

TREE MAGIC

NATURE'S ANTENNAS

Edited by
Jackie Hofer

SunShine Press Publications



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DEDICATION

Tree Magic: Nature's Antennas
is dedicated to
global friends,
advocates
and
protectors
of
trees
everywhere.



PRAISE FOR TREE MAGIC

Tree Magic opens a door into a fascinating world. For those of us who love trees and can hear their individual songs released by the passing of the winds, this is magic. You should certainly add Tree Magic to your collection.

—**Dr. Jane Goodall** - Founder, *The Jane Goodall Institute & UN Messenger of Peace*

The powerful images and moving words of Tree Magic provide inspiration to members of the conservation community who work daily to protect the health and diversity of our hardwood forests. This gift is a wonderful way to say thank you to champions of conservation or anyone who appreciates the beauty of nature. Jackie Hofer has put together a wonderful collection that every conservationist can return to for rejuvenation and motivation over and over again.

—**Gwen Griffith** - *Tennessee Forests Council*

The best way to get grounded is to go camping in an Ancient Forest. The next best way is to curl up in front of Tree Magic and share the experiences of a wonderful collection of authors, photographers and artists who really love trees.

—**Denis Hayes** - Chairman, *Earth Day Network*

An artistic labor of love by editor and publisher Jackie Hofer, this anthology ushers poetry and prose into a new place in the electronic world. Hofer has created an easy-to-use online anthology. Directions are easy to follow. Navigation is pure fun! Arranged alphabetically by the title and author of the work, Hofer's anthology presents the work of many award-winning, hard-working poets and writers. The 115 photos and paintings provide an online gallery that enhances the reading experience—and, in some cases, provide a visual poem or meditation in and of themselves. It's a unique and new approach to poetry and short stories that combines the visual and the written word. Some really beautiful photos are included, and even one poem is set to music.

—**Kathleen Cain** - author of *Luna: Myth and Mystery*, and *The Cottonwood Tree: An American Champion*, Johnson Books.

What a towering gift to the world you have created in Tree Magic. I have been slowly reading through it, savoring its beauty and wisdom in meditation size bites! Everything from the words themselves, the poignant quotes and stunning illustrations, to the reader friendly ability to skip intelligently from author to work and so on, adds to the glory of the manuscript; a true joy for the eye, heart and mind.

—**Arlene G. Levine** - Author of *39 Ways to Open Your Heart*. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, an Off Broadway show, journals & anthologies.

Last weekend was special. I had the opportunity to review Tree Magic and loved every moment. Jackie Hofer has created a powerful testimony to trees. Through extraordinary poetry and prose, matched by the beauty of the photographs, Tree Magic pays special tribute to the majesty of trees and the power of imagination.

—**Bill Meadows** - President, *The Wilderness Society*

Tree Magic: Nature's Antennas takes readers and listeners on a voyage of discovery and appreciation of trees and the natural world. Through its innovative format, Tree Magic opens up the world of trees to new audiences, as well as to old friends of SunShine Press Publications. Through evocative poems, stories, photos, artwork, and even music, Tree Magic brings to life the wonder and power of trees to move us, and to make life more meaningful for us all.

—**John Rosenow** - President, *National Arbor Day Foundation*

Jackie Hofer's Tree Magic: Nature's Antennas is a deep and inspiring work of stories, poems, photographs, paintings and more on the beauty of trees which are so necessary for our survival and which create such beauty on our beloved Earth.

—**George Winston** - composer, musician, solo pianist and Winner of 38th Annual Grammy Award.



PREFACE



Trees are truly Nature's antennas. They clean the air and scrub the soil. They inhale noxious carbon dioxide, exhale life-sustaining oxygen and soak up damaging chemicals. The world owes a great debt to trees. When cut down, they release the carbon dioxide they have absorbed and it goes back into the atmosphere.

Tree Magic: Nature's Antennas is a 450 page collection of 169 poems and stories by authors about the impact of trees in their lives. The authors represent a diverse group, from one author with over 3200 pieces published to a high school senior planning a double-major in writing and music in college. There are 115 photographs and paintings interspersed among the poems and stories

Research and experience has shown the healing and therapeutic value of trees in people's lives. Dr. Roger Ulrich of Texas A&M University noted that drivers who passed green space and urban forests on their commute to work were able to perform complex tasks faster and more accurately than those passing strip malls and concrete barriers.

There is evidence that patients in hospitals do better when they have trees and greenery viewable from their rooms. Inner city neighborhoods have less violent crime and drug problems where there are trees and community gardens available to the tenants.

One tree enthusiast notes that trees are vital to our spirit. Trees have a calming and energizing effect on us. Developers and new home buyers are realizing the importance of leaving older trees in place or planting larger new trees between homes. Neighbors get along better where there are ample trees nearby. Children still like to climb, play, and fantasize in trees.

John Rosenow, President of the National Arbor Day Foundation says, "All of our lives are enriched by trees. The shelterbelt at the edge of a field helps protect topsoil, retain soil moisture, and improve crop yields. Windbreaks shelter rural homes. And in cities and towns, trees help maintain the quality of watersheds, the areas of land from which water drains to a shared destination such as a river, pond, or stream. Trees slow rain and help it percolate into the soil. Wherever we live, and whatever natural challenges we face, trees aid our comfort and survival. They're also living proof that each of us can help create a better world by planting and caring for the conservation of trees that have long transformed America."

Trees are our antennas and life-lines to a better, more beautiful world.

—Jackie Hofer



Of all the wonders of nature a tree in summer is perhaps the most remarkable; with the possible exception of a moose singing "Embraceable You" in spats.
— *Woody Allen*



VIEWING TIPS



Please take a few minutes to read these tips as they will make your viewing of *Tree Magic* more enjoyable.

Tree Magic opens in Adobe Reader® with the **Fit in Window** view on your computer monitors.

Four Navigation symbols appear at the corners of each page are especially helpful in Full Screen view.

Click on Top Left symbol  to go to **Table of Titles**. (Click on any title to go to the poem or story.)

Click on Top Right symbol  to go the **Table of Authors**. (Click on any author to go to their work.)

Click on Bottom Left page number to bring up **Go To Page** box. (Enter page desired to go to that page.)

Click on Bottom Right **F** in box to go to **Full Screen** view. (Press the Escape key to return to the Adobe Reader® screen showing menus, bookmarks, thumbnails, tools, and other features.)

Page Navigation

Use the Page Up, Page Down or arrow keys to go to the previous or next page.

Also, Adobe Reader® has its own navigation and viewing icons on the tool and menu bars.

Contents

Click on any Title, Author or Picture and read a brief biography about the contributor.

Navigation Pane (located on left side of Adobe Reader® window).

Click on **Bookmarks** Tab and go to the topics listed.

Click on **Thumbnails/Pages** Tab to see reduced images of pages. (Click on the page desired.)

Return to the page where you stopped during your previous reading session.

Click on the page number (lower left) and type in the number of the last page viewed.

Some versions of Adobe Reader® allow you to set a startup preference to Return to Last Page Viewed.

Note:

Photographs and paintings appear before and after every other writing. In most cases, they do not bear any direct relationship to the writings before or after the pictures. They do add color, interest and variety to the presentation.



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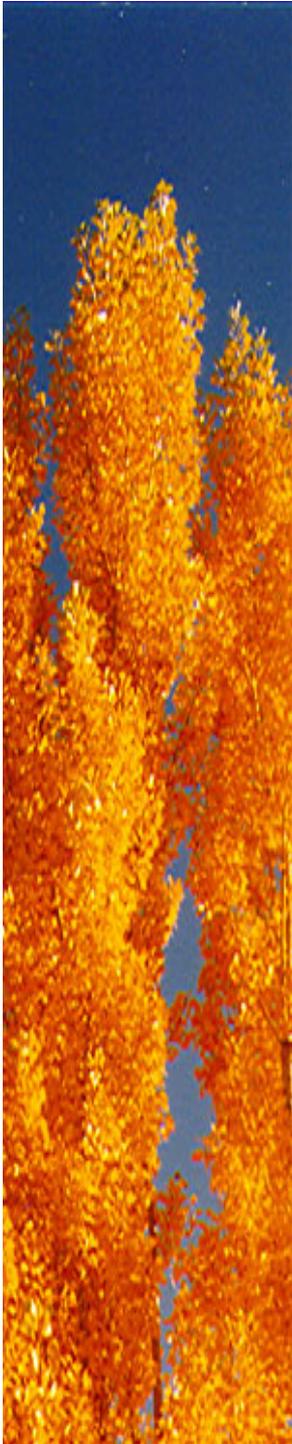
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Poems & Stories



Trees Are Life



A BLESSING FOR THE WOODS

Michael S. Glaser

Before I leave, almost without noticing,
before I cross the road and head toward
what I have intentionally postponed—

Let me stop to say a blessing for these woods:
for crows barking and squirrels scampering,
for trees and fungus and multi-colored leaves,

for the way sunlight laces shadows
through each branch and leaf of tree,
for these paths that take me in,
for these paths that lead me out.





A CUTTING EVENT

Cherise Wyneken

It's late Sunday afternoon
time to trim the orange trees.
I watch and hold the ladder—
cringe.
Each saw-toothed stroke
on the Hamlin's sturdy arms
makes mine bleed.
The hedge-clipper roars
spewing noxious fumes
saw dust
flutters through the air like snow
yellow allamandas
hang their bell-shaped heads
sorrowing for their friends
blue jays and cardinals
abandon the bird-bath.

I know—
pruning's good for trees.
I toss a half-formed green Valencia
in the dumpster
and wonder
does it work that way for me?





Trees have from time immemorial been closely associated with magic.
—*Scott Cunningham*



A PINK CHERRY BLOSSOM

Toby MacLennan

flies up your shirtsleeve
and trembles
down your arm

Wind rushes
into the back of your head
and parts your hair

Blossoms sweep off the trees
like swarms of locusts
blotting out the sky

You grab for a tree, but can't hold on

Pink petals rain over your body
like warm showers

Plummet into your nose and ears

Slide into your stomach
and fill your mouth

Until you become

a living container

for spring





A SUNDAY WALK WITH FATHER

Todd Davis

Late November,
often dark and smudged
underfoot, closes with ice
and fog.

Under the black walnut,
rime rides up over branches;
hoarfrost licks yellowing
grass, webs soil white, slips
its covering upon my head,
while upon your face, two-day old
beard shows like early snow.

On this Sunday,
we have walked to our woodlot,
beyond harvested fields and dimly lit barns,
to spread our arms round ash, to embrace,
our limbs notching, knotting,
so when they cut us,
fell this ash
near the aging stream,
they will see in the ring that marks
your sixty-second year,
 all that was wooden,
 all that was lovely,
burning in November fires.





The tree which moves some to tears of joy is
in the eyes of others only a green thing which
stands in the way.

— *William Blake*



A THANK YOU NOTE TO A FRIEND



Michael Kaump

Hello, Mr. Tree
What's up?
I'm kind of far away now
but I guess you will get
the feeling of this.

My name is Michael, and
you helped me
when I had cancer

These were some of
the scariest and
worst days I had.



You gave me the ability
to overcome the nausea and
side effects of radiation.

You helped me overcome
the negative feelings
that I felt.

So I love to say
thank you Mr. Pine Tree.
You are a wonderful creature and
a creation of
the most high God.

I would like to express that
you are also
a friendly creation—



a high level consciousness
you could determine that
I needed your help
during that time.

Every time I needed you,
all I had to do was
show up there
in that little park,
find you,
stand there and
you would give me
your wonderful, healing scent.



And, that scent was heavenly.
It was heavenly, and
it was God-given,
I am sure.
So, Mr. Pine Tree,
someday I will be able
to repay you—
who knows how
or when.

The cancer hasn't come back
and I'm doing good.
Hangin' in there and
hope you're doing the same.

Maybe my telling
this story is how by
giving you credit for
what you have done and



allowing the memory
of you
to be
in my mind.

Just to think about you and
how you helped me
to feel better
gives me solace
each day.

You were a lifter
of love, and
you were
and are
still loved.

Michael is a thirty-nine year old blind musician.





A TREE FOR ALL SEASONS

Frank Finale

I love the row of four evergreens at our friend Bonnie's house. Although I had barely noticed them until they were inching above me and starting to block the path to her door, I had been aware of them for a long time.

I thought back to a spring twenty-five years ago. Bonnie's eighty-nine year old grandmother had become frail and no longer able to take care of her house and yard. She decided it was time to put the house up for sale, and a realtor advised her to cut the waist-high weeds that had overtaken her yard. Bonnie felt obliged to help and so, on a spring weekend, she took her three-year old son Keith, and together they went to grandmother's house near the Hudson River in upstate New York.

When they entered the thicket of her grandmother's overgrown yard, the top of Keith's blond head disappeared among the taller weeds. Putting Keith in the nearby gated sun porch, Bonnie began using a scythe to cut away at the weeds. After an hour's work, she discovered a row of three tiny pine trees, each about ten inches high, struggling to survive among the growth. When she finally finished clearing the weeds, with her grandmother's permission she dug the trees up and transported them to the Jersey Shore where she planted them parallel to her own driveway. What a happy coincidence, she thought, that the trees were about the same age as Keith.

As years passed, both son and trees grew healthy and strong. Some four years later, Bonnie decided that another evergreen would complete the natural windbreak for her house and yard. So, after Christmas, she and her husband took down their Christmas tree, a seven-year old Norway Spruce, and planted it a little farther apart but still in line with the other evergreens. This tree also matched her son's age, now seven. Every year it grew a couple of feet, straight and strong.

While she was able to travel, Bonnie's grandmother visited her and the transplanted evergreens. Bonnie told her, "I will always have something—*three somethings*—to remember you and the house by the Hudson." Her grandmother's eyes lit up and blurred with happiness.

Only a few months later, her grandmother passed away in her sleep. Among the items she left Bonnie were three cardboard boxes with "For Bonnie Only" printed in red marker on each. The three cartons contained antique Christmas ornaments from a time when craftsmanship and beauty mattered.

As Keith grew, so did the evergreens, and Bonnie had her windbreakers. While her neighbors would experience damage to their homes during heavy windstorms, Bonnie's two-bedroom house always escaped without a single window being broken. After one fierce nor'easter, she ventured outside



to find a virtual backyard up in the trees: an aluminum table and two garden chairs, a garbage can and lid, and bits of jettison from everyday life in the neighborhood. She picked the items out of the branches of her steadfast spruces and returned what property she could. Once, she even found a ragged blue running shoe perched on an upper branch.

The evergreens cast triangles of shade on her house and cooled it on hot days, giving the air conditioner a needed hiatus. More important, she and Keith could breathe more easily.

In spring, acrobatic squirrels raced with incredible speed on their personal highway; they used the network of branches to reach the roofs of the house and garage. There wasn't any break in this onslaught either; baby squirrels learned from their elders. Cardinals, chickadees, blue jays, and red-winged blackbirds flocked to the evergreens, adding vivid color to the branches. On occasion, hundreds of starlings would fill the branches. With their iridescent black color, studded with small white dots, they blended in with the shadows of the dark green spruces, giving them a natural camouflage. Their whistles and chattering made puzzled passersby turn around quickly as if something in the trees were calling out to them.

But birds weren't the only ones that found refuge there. A family of brown rabbits took up residence under the two spruces closest to the wooden garage. Bonnie would go out every so often and feed them carrots and lettuce from her vegetable bin, hoping it might slow down their ravishing of her garden. It rarely did. They preferred to nibble at the edges of her herbs. Generations later, the descendants of those rabbits still live there.

Through divorce, remarriage, birthdays, graduations, and changes in the seasons, Bonnie's friendship with my wife, Barbara, and I was constant, growing like the spruces, strong and healthy even when we sometimes weren't. When Bonnie succumbed to a low point during her divorce, my wife Barbara was there to take her and her son in so that she could finish her education and teach. Years later, when it looked as if Barbara would have to have by-pass surgery, Bonnie was there to comfort and help.

This kinship with Bonnie, Keith, and her new husband, Tom, remains firmly rooted in our lives. I began to feel, as well, a kinship with the Norway spruce, which I had witnessed growing from a holiday adornment to an all-season protector of their home and a habitat for birds, small mammals, insects, and other creatures. The Christmas tree grew larger than the other spruces because it was planted a little distance from them and had more room to spread out its densely needled branches. Its flexible branches arched upward and could bear being laden with wet snow, bouncing back intact after the snow melted. Needles and large cones drooped from its branches, giving its pyramid shape a somber yet stately appearance. Its bark, sometime gray, was usually the color of cinnamon and flaky like good pastry. Bonnie often gave the windfall of the spruce's large cones to schoolchildren who would make



wreaths and ornaments. The Christmas spruce also seemed to have an uncanny sense of space, spreading its branches out over the yard but never growing any new shoots across the short path that Keith and his friends made through the stand of trees.

And it was by Bonnie's big spruce tree that, years ago, I met Gary Tallent, the bass guitarist of Springsteen's E Street Band. Bonnie had offered him a low rent to store his Corvette in her garage when he was going on a road trip. After he returned, he felt the rate was too low and wanted to pay something extra. She refused, saying she was proud to know a local boy who was doing so well. He continued to do well and now has six cars and a studio in Nashville.

Neighbors let Bonnie know when some neighborhood teens, out on their own, started to hide under the largest spruce while drinking beer. Bonnie put a quick stop to this by talking reasonably but firmly to them, never raising her voice, never threatening. One young man came back years later to show her how well he was doing and to reminisce. "I'm glad to see my hiding tree," he said.

Just recently, after a luscious dinner at Bonnie's, my wife and I wandered outside and paused by the largest spruce-an old friend now. The light of a full-flower moon lilted on its shadowy needles, and a slight breeze stirred, creating a melodious murmur in its branches and carrying the sweet scent of lilacs from a bush nearby. For a moment, we seemed lifted out of our bodies and became one with the night and this living, green cathedral. Thinking that we might have a problem, Bonnie came out to join us but when she saw the joy in our faces, she knew there was no problem. "Isn't it beautiful?" she asked. Standing on a soft carpet of needles and bathing in the spruce's aura, we looked up, our faces white with moonlight, and gazed at its crown spiring to the stars. We were all still for a long moment, and then the dove-like *hoo-hoo-hoo* from an owl broke our trance.

Saying goodnight, Bonnie hugged us and went inside. We took a last look at the tree, and with a deep breath of spring air, and a sigh, we left for home. The spirit of the tree and its gift to us remains caught in my heart.





The cultivation of trees is the cultivation of the good, the beautiful and the ennobling in man.

—*J. Sterling Morton*



A TREE THAT LEFT ITS MOTHER

Irene Ferraro

love is the vessel
in which fire
is poured
love is the fire
as well
love may be crazy
or lonely
or blind
but love is
holy and pure
a fire
that stands
away from itself
like a tree
on its own





A YEAR OF YELLOW

Susan Landon

An early frost sealed the sap,
and set the palette elves to work.
A heartfelt crimson blends with ease,
and brilliant orange spills right out.
But deep-hued yellow takes a patient hand,
nights of yearning, and a willing heart.

On mild October nights
before the wrench of winter cold,
the elves each night transmute
a bit of chlorophyll to gold.
The elves are clever, leaping
from tree to tree, lighting
first this one, then that.
In time, every maple on the block
becomes a feast of suns.

I cannot go out this year,
but taste the tang
of autumn at each window.
I learn that every dying leaf
owns a bit of glory. To this
I add a tender crescent moon
between the rootlike hands
that autumn bares in trees.
How then to shut an aching eye,
give way to sorrow, start to die.





The leaves of life keep



falling one by one.



AN ELDER REMEMBERS TREES

Lynda Skeen

I was born in a time when there were still trees, when we could play in the barky arms of those gray giants and get stuck like cats after climbing too high, or fall when stretching out onto branches that were too thin to support us. We crawled up their sides like ants, hung bags of food in their branches for safety from bears, carved into their sides our lovers' initials, then crossed the initials out, hung upside down and giggled as our faces filled with blood like the bellies of well-fed ticks. If we were lucky, we would fall asleep against a tree and wake to find a raccoon's claw marks in the soft bark next to our head. We had the wind knocked out of us, our knees scraped like the skin of an oak, bark and leaves laced in our hair like ribbons, and would come home happily smelling like outside.



I was born in a time when we built our lives on trees: living room floors, teak dressers, toothpicks, pencils, reams of bleached paper, ceilings and walls and papier maché piñatas; wrapping paper, futon frames, Popsicle sticks. We sang taunting rhymes to each other about so-and-so and so-and-so sitting in a tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-g, and later sang lullabies about trees to our babies, soft lyrics about branches breaking and children falling. Trees were everywhere, and each time we caught a whiff of them in the sawdust of a lumberyard or the fresh, open pages of a bookshop, we fell in love all over again. The smell of trees promised sky. And how they lured us back into their woods! How they lured us back into their branches!

I was born in a time when there were still trees and strangers, when adrenaline flowed as you looked into dark bushes' shadows and wondered if you'd just seen a masked face or the face of a fleeting deer. Then, you could be alone with trees, privately wrapping your legs around their smooth, hard trunks and pulling your body toward the sky.



When there were still trees, leaves fell like feathers, softly and full of color. Even city trees blessed us with their reds and oranges, magenta and yellows of fall, or when they simply hovered green above our heads in the summer, even if we didn't notice.

In the beginning there might have been darkness, but then there was the mystery of trees, and then there was darkness again.





ANOTHER THING I LOVE ABOUT TREES

Susan Steger Welsh

Every year they blow their entire allowance
of leaves, give up whistling in favor
of the occasional moan—
deciduous drama queens
who pose for months as skeletons,
until we sink into melancholy,
barely able to name what's missing.
But they only play-act death.
They didn't mean it, they take it back.
You wake after dreaming they're still
alive, and they are.





Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth.

—*Hermann Hesse*



APPLE TREE *

Jessica Tina Chang

Golden fruits grow sweet
in cloudless times,
Dipping in warm light.
They fade in autumn,
When sunshine
Kisses blushing leaves,
Releasing them
To whirl, swirl, and
Fall with gentle wind.

* "Apple Tree" was inspired by several phrases from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Autumn," which can be found in lines 1, 2, 3, and 9.





ÁRBOL MÍO

Judith Lyn Sutton

El madroño
Mi madroño,
Mystic melody
Sounds in my soul

Mahogany arms,
El madroño,
Reaching for heaven
You make me whole

Evergreen mirrors,
El madroño,
Reflecting sunbeams
Your shade is my home.

Bending and weaving,
El madroño,
Singing as wind blows
I'm never alone.

Evening falls softly,
El madroño,
A vision in purple
You move me to tears

Crown of the forest,
El madroño,
Stars in your branches
Melting my fears.





El madroño
Mi madroño,
You glisten in moonlight,
Árbol mío,
you glisten in moonlight,
Árbol mío, árbol mío.





The tree
is a slow,
enduring force
straining
to win
the sky.

—*Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*





AS A LIVE OAK

Jim Fisher

light
streaming from the sun
 into leaf
 meets with vapor
rising through stomata underneath
 waxen layers
 sealing water in the blade
 absorbed photons humming
molecules fused to sugar
 excess oxygen exhaled
 glucose moving through tubes into the midrib
 pumped to petiole and twig
 plucking up
 charged particles
 carbon bonded in starches
trunk sucking tannins through vascular rays
 cell walls stiff with lignin
tissue of the heartwood astringent and bitter
 surrounded by columns drawing water to the crown
 a great roar of up flowing
moisture drawn from underground sealed in the leaf
 sugars carried to shoots and then burned
canopy catching quanta photon after photon
 roots radiating under evergreen shade





ASLEEP IN THE UNDERCUT



Tony D'Arpino

A man is sleeping
In the undercut
Of a giant redwood tree
In woods at the edge of the world

Ten men could stand
In this carved cave
For the black flash photograph
Before the final fall

Logs so large
A single tree
Fills twenty flatbeds
On the forest train

One log per car
Steaming toward the sawmill
In the morning fog
Downhill through the slash

The sleeper dreams
The trees are high and cold
In this paradise
On the edge of the green world

The sleeper is a young man
Still healthy in his fir-sickness
Caught sleeping in the undercut
He dreams of ancient wood

Sleeping in his axe





Trees outstrip most people in the extent and
depth of their work for the public good.

—*Sara Ebenreck*



BANDON-BY-THE-SEA

Henri Bensussen

It's 8 A.M. Me at The Minute Café
with the single men, each alone,
portioned down the counter like eggs
in a carton, crouched over cups
of coffee, a doughnut, a muffin.
The waitresses stand nearby talking—
some guy they know, his hair
blazed up at a party,
how everyone laughed, even him.



Chuck the real estate agent
pulls up in his old blue car.
I go out and wave hello,
tell him of logging on the land
next to mine. He sneers.
Chain-sawed, cut-off-at-the-knee,
piles of severed limbs—not his style.
He wants trees pulled out
by their roots, like teeth,
leaving a smooth, level tract.
Land ready to put a house on.

Back at my small trailer
a mile away in the forest
Helen the logging rep stops by.
My neighbor's trashed land, low and wet,
is just right for a cranberry bog.
Cranberries sell, she tells me.
He'd be set for life. I wonder,
what's the lifetime of a cranberry grower?



My bet's on the trees,
fighters down but not out.
Those men from town, loners,
the spares, we watch for seeds
to sprout in wedges of new light,
plants driven to grow spreading green
beneath the slash. It's what we hope for
It's all we know.





BEARDED TREE

Christopher Woods

We come to it
After a walk
Through the field
Late afternoon
Shadows closing in
Sunlight already golden.

Old tree,
Its beard scraggly
Flowing with time
The memory of souls
Drifting over the land
Having left lives and bodies
Graced with hair, all colors,
Caressed, remembered, loved
But unwilling to leave
Entirely for the other place
So strands grab the old limbs
To hold on, to stay behind
In the blood red sun
Shadows crisscrossing
Fields, days, other shadows,
Even our thoughts as we pass
Beneath the tree and on
And on.





I like trees because they seem more resigned to the way they have to live than other things do.

— *Willa Cather*



BEECH TREE IN WINTER

Joan I. Siegel

All winter
it wears its coppery leaves
like an old woman
in her faded housedress
who waits up long after
the rest of the family
has gone to bed.

All winter
she keeps watch.

All winter
memory settles
like snow
around the house.





BETWEEN THE BRANCHES

Janice DeRuiter

of a tree
hide worlds if you
release yourself to see.
Look deep between the leaves
until you find
every blade of grass
on the hill beyond.
Expand until you hear
the flutter of bird wing,
the settling on a branch.

Look deep
until each drop of dew
is a single universe,
each meadow grass,
a golden sun,
worlds within worlds
and you but a leaf, branch,
dew or the fluttering wing
call in the late summer air.





Suburbia is where the developer bulldozes out
the trees, then names the streets after them.

—*Bill Vaughn*



BIRCH

Louis Gallo

He was older than I expected—his wife
chirped like a girl on the telephone—
coarser, looked like nothing other
than the blunt fact that he was.
Stained overalls, square face, skin
alligatored from years in the sun.
I walked across the yard to shake hands.
"That's the tree," I said,
pointing to the lifeless birch.
"We kind of liked it. It was alive
when we bought the house two years ago.
I hate to cut a tree."
The man raised his gaze and sniffed,
looking at the tree, started to lug
his chainsaw and a coil of rope.
"Need help?" I asked.
He shook his head and trotted up the slope.
I went back to be with my wife.
We liked the tree.
We watched him angle two notches
into its trunk so it would fall
away from the wires and windows;
then, with a fierce swipe, he sliced
right through the middle.
It fell across the walkway
and he cut it into pieces for firewood.
When he finished I approached him.
He looked me over, cleared his throat.





"Twenty dollars?" I asked, and he nodded.
I gave him two crisp bills
which he stuffed into the wide middle pocket.
He waved goodbye, then tossed his tools
into the truck and drove away.
"He didn't say a word," my wife said.
True, I thought, no words;
but I saw him gently touch the bark
for no reason
before making that first deep notch.





BIRTHDAY GIRL'S TREE HOUSE



Karen Benke

She prefers the edge
 of her imagination—
the way she used to climb
 the old pine behind her childhood,
almost to the top, the ball of the sun
 sinking into the bay, sap dying
the palms of her hands yellow.
 Breathless, she held on
daring herself to look down,
 when all she really wanted
was to fly, the way all children do,
 wishing the invisible could
buoy them up into blue.

Each birthday, her father lit the candles
 from the inside out, each orange flame
dancing above chocolate,
 her mother holding a balloon,
warning her she had to be careful,
 reaching deeper
into the years—

until decades passed, and another
 man no longer her father
brought her roses, an apology
 for the caution he kept
inside his dusky heart. Night after night,
 the petals darkened and fell—
the scent of pine caught outside
 her bedroom window.





To exist as a nation,
to prosper as a state,
and to live as people,
we must have trees.
—*Theodore Roosevelt*



BREATHING

Sharon Scholl

Overhead, the tree that scrapes
my roof is breathing. Wrapped
in yellow sheets of street light,
the tree and I clasp like lovers
feasting on each other's breath.
It rocks me in its shadow branches
trembling across the floor.
In my sleep the tree sighs
with a shimmering of leaves.
By day its capillaries froth
with oxygen, luring moisture from the soil,
spinning it through dense aquatic tunnels
scored beneath the bark.
The earth that rims my bed is slowly
seeping upward, sucked by this giant
straw. Through green gauze leaves
my dead breath filters like plankton
drifting toward the ocean floor.
Chlorophyll dances there in electric
spasms, merging breath and water
in transubstantiation. Invisibly
from each leaf's veined surface
translucent globes of oxygen levitate,
streaming over summer lawns,
sifting delicately through my window.





I try to listen past this flow
into the appalling multitude of cell
rhythms, each with its own duration,
each lifting a transparent body
to the solar radiance. This world
is too infinite, too complex
for my perception. It is enough
that we share one dream, the tree
and I embracing in the dark.





BRISTLECONE

Gordon Yaswen

Consider the bristlecone
pines of mountaintops,
lasting thousands of years
where other trees cannot
survive a season.

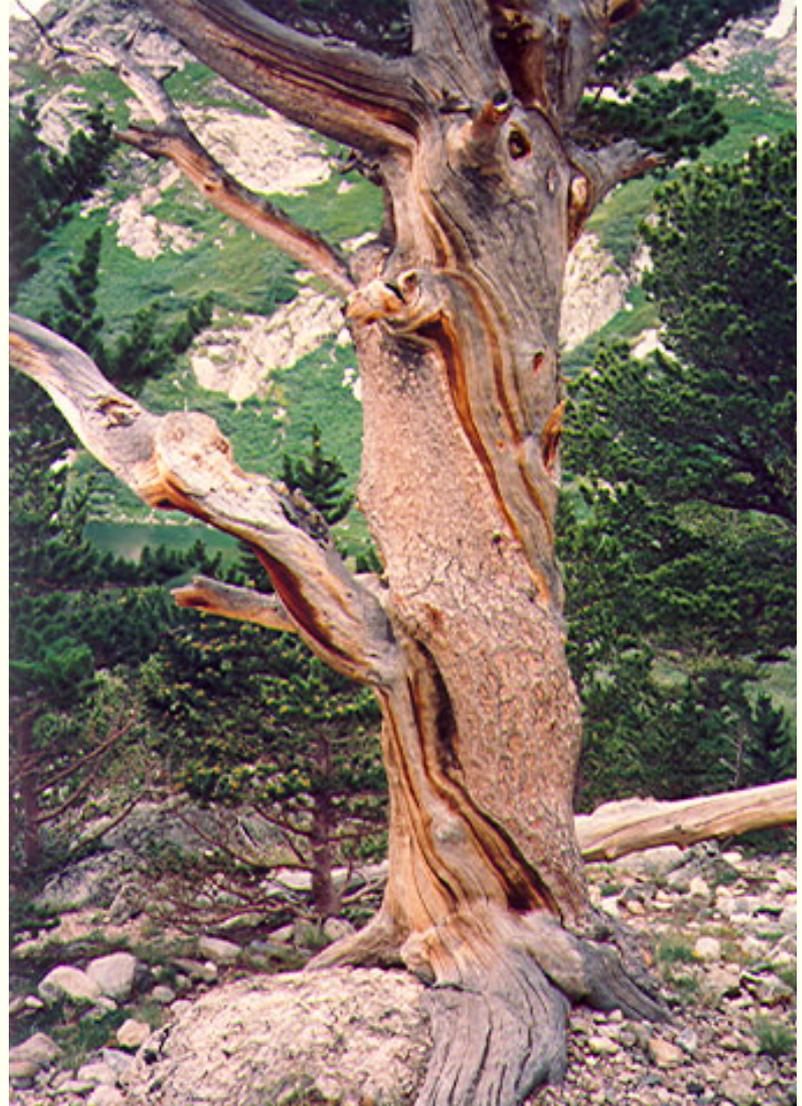
They grow so slow
and dense their wood
that their childhood
takes forever,
and maturity
can span centuries,
and in their final death
even the carcass
becomes a monument
lasting ages more.

They live so long
by knowing to *yield*
to wind, cold, drought;
even to *die*
back in hard times,
to just what they need;
and stay small,
and close to ground,
and the harsher their youth;
the longer they live.
I'm like that, I think,
...and hope.





Nature,
to
be
commanded,
must
be
obeyed.
—*Francis Bacon*





**BROTHER,
John Fitzpatrick**

you have snapped
off my trunk
too soon.
Spirit of your
limb
flow in me
still
in the luster
and grain
of my own
becoming.

*for Dave and Barb Stickle,
in tribute to Robert*





BURNING TREE

Rachel Baumgardner

My Daddy had to burn the tree.
It was an apple tree.
An apple tree that had no right
Growing where it was.
Surrounded by oaks
On the edge of the woods.
Little and squat.
Big, fat branches.
I loved to hug those branches.
Would pretend I was hugging Daddy.
The perfect size for a hug.
Had God-awful apples.
So sour.
One lick could suck your cheeks
To the back of your throat.
Beautiful in spring, though.

That was a bad year for bugs.
Hot as hell, and dry, too.
The sun baked all the ferns
To a nice, golden brown
Long before August.
Little tree didn't stand a chance.
Tent worms.
Looked like Spanish moss.
Suffocating the whole thing.
Daddy didn't want them to get in the oaks.
Had to burn that little tree.





I lied to Daddy.
Told him it was the smoke
That made me cry.





If a tree dies,
plant another in its place.
—*Linnaeus*





CALL OF THE OAKS
(*Ars Poetica Antiqua*)

Paul Sohar

Oaks are all the friends I need
And all the friends I've got
Whether they are dressed in green
Or naked to the knot

Friends they are as friends they come
From the same old mold
Created by the poets I like
The sacred poets of old

When the wind hums in the woods
It's the same old tale
And old tales are what I like best
For they never fail

They never fail to take me up
On their knotted lines
To the view of other hills
Where my stutter rhymes

Where oaks and beeches give the call
In the same old tongue
Calling me to join them
In their sacred song





CHILD AUTUMN

David Radavich

Tree—where are you going,
so forlorn?

Your hands are dropping
one by one,
and you are waving.

You disappear into the dark.

I see you sneak toward the moon,
tickling the clouds.

I would follow,
but your steps are too big.

Come back next year
and bring me some blossoms,

O tree that remembers!





TREES ARE CALMING



William R. Stimson

Mine is a front apartment on the third floor. Out my window, across the street, is a park. Behind the park, a line of brownstones. Atop one of these, a penthouse I can see right into because its whole north wall facing my apartment is one huge picture window. In that penthouse lives a shapely blond who peels off her clothes in the hallway, in full view of the window. She'll often stand right in front of the big window talking on the phone stark naked—fully exposed to the park, the street, and all the apartment windows like mine.

When her husband is at home, none of this goes on. He's a short squat unattractive balding man—some sort of corporate executive I would guess by the amount of time he spends away from home, and the fact they are never there on weekends.

Before I decided I wasn't going to buy into this woman's game anymore, and gave my binoculars away to my sister, I spent quite a bit of time with them, looking out my window. Binoculars in a city are amazing. An inaccessible bird perched on a bare branch atop a tall tree becomes close and intimate. You can study its every gesture. It's easy to spend a long time looking. The foliage of the trees in the park and back yards become lush cascades of greenery. For an instant you can forget you're in the city.

As I was peering into the trees one day with my binoculars, I discovered that there was one honey locust tree off in the corner of the park, up against the tall back fence, that was being strangled by a run-away Wisteria vine. The vine, that seemed to be planted in the back yard of one of the brownstones, was covering the fence and had gotten up into the crown of the tree. The poor tree was almost completely covered by the vine, which was suffocating it by taking all its light. Only one new branch of the tree was still free. It reached high above the rest of the crown towards the light, as if it were struggling to outpace the rapacious creeper. With my binoculars, I could make out the first insidious green tendrils of the vine working their way up that last free branch.

Over the months I kept a sporadic eye on the honey locust and its losing battle with the Wisteria. Winter came and went. The leaves vanished and returned. By the next summer, the vine was proliferating all over the last remaining branch. The tree was a goner. Its last stab at light, and hope, had been foiled.

The park was a schoolyard during the day, closed off to the public. After school and on weekends, a man named Tito unlocked it and opened it up for neighborhood use. Tito, a quiet aging full-bearded Puerto Rican who wore a Fidel Castro hat, was the super of one of the buildings down the block. He was the don of all the Puerto Rican supers up and down the block. They all deferred to him. Thus it had fallen to him to be the caretaker of the park. On one occasion, some kids were doing drugs there



and he went over and unceremoniously locked them in. They didn't come back. Tito often sat stationed atop a low wall in front of his building, where he had a good prospect of the whole street—and an excellent view of the penthouse with the blond.

After Tito opened the park one afternoon, I walked over to take a closer look at the strangled tree. Seen up close, the tree's plight was much more pathetic than I had imagined. Sure enough, the vine came over the high fence. It had huge anaconda-like coils, as thick as my arm, winding up into the crown of the tree. Many of the branches of the tree had lost their leaves because there was no light. The whole crown of the tree was a mass of dead branches, many of them vine branches that had died as the vine grew higher and higher, suffocating not only the tree, but also its own lower growth.

A Puerto Rican custodian at the school tended to the maintenance of the park. I came down one day when I saw him sweeping up out by the sidewalk. "You see that tree..." I addressed him in Spanish, pointing.

He gave me a dismissive look and then cast a cursory glance in the direction I was indicating. He didn't stop sweeping.

"You see the lighter green leaves of the vine, how it's covering over the tree," I pointed out. "The vine is killing the tree. Somebody has to cut it."

The custodian had an attitude like he was being approached by one of those crazies you find in the city. They come toward you and start talking about something that doesn't make any sense at all. Before you can find some excuse to pull away from them, they've already gone off somewhere else. I knew for a fact the word with the Puerto Ricans on the block was that I was a bit on the loony side. "*Esta loco,*" I heard one of the Puerto Rican kids playing in the park explain to a newcomer one day as I was doing my kung fu exercises there. For a long time I pondered why they might think this. And then one day, after I'd returned from a short trip, Jose, the Puerto Rican super, commented "I wondered where you were." He added, "I didn't hear any talking coming from your apartment."

"Talking?" I asked, not understanding.

"Talking to yourself," he laughed.

It only struck me what he was talking about when I was half way upstairs. I often talk out loud when I'm writing, pronouncing phrases or sentences as they come to me - out loud. I write them down like someone taking dictation. And then, at other times, as I'm taking a shower or going about the apartment doing chores, I have developed the habit of giving a voice to vague feelings that rise in me on the spot, spontaneously. Some people have to go to a psychologist to find out their hidden feelings, or work with dreams. I have found that it's just as efficacious, and very useful for a writer, to let feelings speak for themselves, to give them a voice—out loud, with words of their choosing, and with a diction



and an emphasis that is of their own making, not mine. It's a fascinating practice, especially for someone like myself who has had so much trouble discovering his own voice as a writer. Once when I was in the kitchen right by the door, engaged in doing this, the doorbell rang. I opened the door immediately—so immediately that I surprised Jose, the super, standing right there. "Talking to yourself!" he laughed, a bit taken off guard, as he handed me a package that had come for me.

The supers of almost all the buildings on the block were Puerto Ricans. They conferred amongst themselves on the street, exchanging information about the various residents of the different buildings. They had a story, a "take", on almost every one. Each resident had a personality, some defining characteristic. Each was associated with some telling episode. I don't think any of these busy new upscale people suspected that they were so "seen", so visible to the Puerto Rican underclass of the neighborhood. They came and went, oblivious of the Puerto Ricans. But the Puerto Ricans saw them. The Puerto Ricans saw everyone and had their own way of seeing them. I was privy to this because I speak Spanish. The way they saw me was that I was "loco." And the custodian looked at me that way as I tried to explain to him that the vine was going to kill the tree unless someone cut it back.

"The vine is pretty," he said, like someone talking sense against gibberish. Then he turned away and continued with his sweeping. It was no use. I knew I had to take things into my own hands.

A few days later, I walked down two long city blocks to Kove Hardware on 6th Avenue. I always feel overwhelmed in a hardware store. There are so many tools and different gadgets and devices. I grew up without a father and don't know what any of these things are for. I waited in the line of plumbers and repairmen, supers and housewives. When my turn finally came, I told the man behind the counter I wanted to see their selection of clippers. Before my mother divorced him, my father had been a horticulturist trying to start his own Hibiscus nursery in Miami, Florida. Clippers were the tool of a nurseryman. My father always walked around with his stainless steel chrome clippers jutting out of his rear pocket. My earliest memories are of him sitting before the muck pile, his prize clippers in hand, snipping Hibiscus cuttings in the scorching Florida sun. When I was in high school, I held down a job working in a nursery after school. I carried my own clippers then. I carried them jutting out of my back pocket. That was a long time ago.

In Kove Hardware, I tried out all the different kinds of clippers they had and chose the most expensive one—a pair of clippers my father would have been proud of. All these years struggling to be a writer, trying to do something I was so inept at, and finally I had a tool in my hands I knew how to use. The man offered to put them in a bag for me. "No," I said, jutting them into my back pocket. I walked out on the street feeling strangely taller, even proud - like a cowboy with his gun.



"Back at the ranch," I got an old aluminum ladder out of the basement and trotted it across the street. Orchids had been my hobby when I was a kid in Cuba, where my mother took us after she divorced my father. I'd scrambled up untold numbers of trees of all kinds searching for wild ones, collecting them, planting them in the trees around my house, checking on them, watching them grow. But the moment I stepped off the wobbly old aluminum ladder from the basement and clambered up into the honey locust tree, I felt how many decades had gone by. I was in my late forties. I had glasses. I was wearing clothes that weren't suitable to climbing a tree. I knew what to do in a tree, but it was an old knowledge. Or rather, I had grown old, so that the knowledge came new to me again. I was surprised at the hesitant expertise, the cautious deliberation, that came out of nowhere as I sought out one sure foothold after another on my way up into the crown of the tree. I climbed and I snipped. I snipped and I climbed. Propping myself securely in the branches, I pulled and yanked long streams of vines. By the time I was finished and down on the ground again, the whole area under the tree was strewn with a thick layer of vines, living and dead. It was one huge tangle of greenery and vine branches. I left it like that so that the custodian might get a hint of what needed to be done. I knew the job wasn't finished—but I was. Out of breath, my arms exhausted from holding on, climbing, pulling myself up and letting myself down, with scratches all over my arms and hands, I folded the ladder back up and retreated.

The next day I looked out of my window. I hadn't made a dent on the vine. There wasn't one little piece of it that was wilted or killed. I knew I had to go back and get those anaconda like branches that had been much too thick for the clippers. I'd take a saw. Meanwhile Jose stopped me in the hallway, "Eh," he said ominously, "Was that you that did that to the tree over in the park."

"I didn't cut the tree," I corrected him. I knew perfectly well what I said to Jose would spread through the Puerto Rican network on the block. "I cut the vine that was killing the tree."

"I don't know!" he pronounced, not exactly buying into my subtle distinction. "They asked me who it was. I didn't say anything... You better stay away. That's the 'school' property. The man is angry."

Rummaging around in the basement when no one was looking, I found an old rusty saw that I thought might work. This time I waited until Sunday when nobody was around. Looking out my window, I made sure the coast was clear. This time I put on sweat pants so that I could climb around in the tree more gingerly. I slipped the clippers in my pocket, dashed down to the basement for the ladder and saw, and emerged onto the street. With a quick glance to the left and the right to make sure the coast was clear, I hurried across to the park.

This time I did a number on the vine. The rusty old saw cut right through the huge twining trunks of the vine up in the tree. I sawed them up in chunks, unwound them from the tree's branches, and threw them down. Then, finished with the saw, I threw it down. From where I was perched I could see



the tendrils of the vine were growing up into the tree from all along the high fence. I had to get on the fence to really cut back the vine. But the fence was too far away.

I spotted a limb that jutted out over the fence. The idea went through my head that, if I hung from that limb I could work my way, hand over hand, over to the fence, balance there and let go of the limb. Then I could crawl along the fencetop snipping the vine at its source. Otherwise I'd never make a dent in the vine because it was everywhere in the high branches, places where I couldn't possibly reach.

One glance down to see how far the ground was below me caused me to immediately dismiss this crazy notion. The next moment I was dangling from the branch, holding on for dear life, and working my way over, Tarzan style, hand over hand to the fence. I couldn't believe I was doing this.

An instant later, I let myself down, a little unsteadily, right atop the fence. Perched precariously in the growth of vine along the top of the fence, I started clipping away. I was alarmed to find there were electrical wires strung along the top of the fence. One inadvertent clip into these and I would be immediately electrocuted. It occurred to me, perched up there with the electrical wires, holding on for dear life lest I lose my balance and tumble off the tall fence, that maybe the Puerto Ricans were right. I had to be crazy to be doing this.

"What you doing?" a little voice called out just at that moment. Hanging on for dear life, I looked down. It was a little Puerto Rican boy standing amidst the strewn heaps of vine on the ground below.

"I'm clipping back this vine on the fence," I answered in a manner meant to be instructive to him.

"Why are you doing that?" he then inquired in a tone that rather expressed what I myself felt at the moment.

"Because it's growing up and strangling the tree," I answered.

"Oh," the little boy said, and then, content with my answer, drifted back to play with his friends.

I worked myself all the way down the fence like this, not knowing if I'd be able to turn around and get back to the tree, since I was clipping back the very vine that was giving me a perch atop the fence. And if I did get back, I didn't know if I could balance myself long enough on the fencetop to stand up and reach the branch overhead that could get me back to the tree. In other words, I wasn't sure I could get down.

When finally the job was finished and I'd indeed gotten safely back to the ground, I surveyed the huge mountain of lianas under the tree. I was all scratched up again and sore but there was a strange and wonderful current going through me again—something I hadn't felt in a long time. I put the clippers in my pocket and began, as best I could, to clean up the mess. I stuffed all the trash baskets in the park full of the lianas and refuse from the vine. I went across the street to the basement of my building and got some of my super's black garbage bags. The rest of the vines I stuffed in these and set the filled bags out by the curb.



The next day I looked out my window. All the pale green covering the darker green crown of the honey locust was withered in the hot sun. This time I'd gotten the vine. The tree would live.

A day or so later I became aware that Tito was eyeing me with darts of disapproval as I went over to the park to do my kung fu exercises. When I came back into my building, Jose accosted me, "You better watch out," he threatened. "That man say, 'Why doesn't he leave the tree alone!'"

"I didn't cut the tree," I insisted, hoping to make myself clear, through Jose, to the whole network of Puerto Rican community-keepers on the block. "I cut the vine that was killing the tree."

Jose looked askance at me, as if he was considering whether it was worth his while trying to make sense to a "crazy".

"That man," I lashed out without thinking, in answer to that look, "is ignorant!"

Jose was visibly taken aback.

"He has no schooling," I continued, "He doesn't know. I have a doctorate in botany. I know about trees. I know what I'm doing."

Jose said nothing. He didn't know what to say.

"They would have to pay somebody a lot of money to do what I did," I went on. "I'm doing it for free. They're lucky to have someone like me here in the neighborhood to do that for them!"

It wasn't just Jose I was talking back to. I was being who I was in the place where I lived. Finally, I had somehow cut my way out from under something that had been strangling me all these New York years. I felt naked and free, standing there in my sweat pants with my clippers jutting out of my pocket—blatantly and unabashedly exposing myself, like the blond in the apartment, to Tito, to Jose, to the street, to the whole world. This was who I was. I was on my ground. The voice that spoke through me rang true. There was no way I was backing down. I turned and walked upstairs.

Jose just stood there silent. "I don't know..." he mumbled ominously at length. He didn't sound too sure of himself. I didn't look back.

The next summer the damned vine was in the tree again. The pieces of writing I worked on were starting to get finished again. I was sending them out. A month went by. Then two months. Then the summer was gone and it was the beginning of Fall. The leaves were still on the trees. The offending vine was rank by now in the crown of the tree. When I went over and checked it out, I saw the clippers wouldn't really help this time. The vine was coming by way of another tree in the back yard across the fence. I didn't know what to do.

Then one day, a week or so later, I saw some tree surgeons at work at the seminary down the street. They had a saw atop a long pole. I knew I'd found my tool. I went and asked if I could borrow it. "No way!" the man answered.



I took some money out of the bank and went down to Kove Hardware again. When I told the man behind the counter what I wanted, he seemed interested, like someone had finally challenged him. He led me back to the rear of the store. Hidden away in a corner, propped behind some other things, we found a single saw like that, atop a long pole. It cost \$45. Besides the saw, there was a clipper at the end of the pole that I could use by pulling a long rope. It turned out perfect. Climbing up in the tree again I reached up with the long pole and trimmed off the high vines coming over from the tree in the back yard. From my window the next day I saw the vine covering the crown of the tree wilt and die.

And so I had that pole saw propped up against the wall in my apartment, taking up space, waiting for the vine. About that time a garbage truck backing up by the curb broke a big branch on the tree in front of my building. The sad branch just hung there for days. Finally I brought my saw down and severed the thing nicely near the trunk. As I was doing this Jose the super came out. We exchanged comments of complicity about garbage trucks and the damage they do by not being careful. When I got the broken branch down, he brought out his own saw from the basement and cut it up in pieces and put it in the garbage.

I talked with him as he worked and then took my pole saw back up to the apartment. I got that feeling again, of the current running through me. My arms were sore later in the day, as were my neck and shoulders. The branch had been big and the muscles I used in sawing it weren't ones I normally used.

It was only then I started noticing, as I walked to work every day, the broken branches on the other street trees up and down the block. A few days later, I got the urge and hauled out my expensive pole saw—figuring I'd get my money's worth if I used it at least once more. I went out and neatly trimmed off a few of the branches the trucks had mangled. One of the Puerto Rican supers materialized out of nowhere. I kept sawing away.

When I stopped to rest my weary arms, he stepped forward to touch the saw and feel it. Then he asked if he could do it a while. "Sure!" I said. He finished the job for me. Another one of the supers came over from across the street. He had a tree over by his building that needed fixing. We all went over there to do his tree.

A few weeks later I was doing my kung fu exercises in the park when some of the Puerto Rican kids came over and asked me to teach them how to kick and punch. And so I started a little class right there and then and instructed the children in the rudiments of the front thrust kick, the forward punch, etc. A day or so later a different Puerto Rican super from down the block came over and thanked me for teaching his kids.



I noticed around this time that Tito started looking at me differently. He doesn't talk much but once, when I nodded to him, he got this twinkle in his eye and nodded back.

When I go down the street, there's always a cluster of Puerto Ricans on one of the stoops or hanging out around some car. One day, without any warning, I was surprised to realize one of them had said "hello" to me as I walked by.

I stopped and turned around. "Hi" I answered back, smiling broadly.
Their faces all lit up.





God is the experience of looking at a tree and saying,
"Ah!"
—*Joseph Campbell*



COTTONWOOD



Simone Poirier-Bures

It felt like an oasis, that gathering of huge old cottonwoods by the banks of the San Juan River in New Mexico, where my husband and I were vacationing. All around it were rock cliffs, searing sun, stunted piñon and sagebrush clinging to the earth with stubborn fingers. But here there was shade, blessed cool, the splendid trees with their outstretched, sheltering arms.

The campground, appropriately named Cottonwood, was full of fishers and their families, for the San Juan is known for its gleaming trout. After breakfast my husband would put on his waders and disappear. I stayed behind to read, to write, to wander around and look at things. The campground would gradually empty as people headed for the river, and a silence would fall, the only sound the rustling of leaves, silvery green, high up in the canopy.

I read, I wrote, I moved my blanket as the sun moved, from this shady spot to that. I looked at the trees, their lower branches drooping, like arms too heavy to lift. I studied the pods they let fall, like tufts of down, like mouse nests.

After a while, time changes. When there is nothing much to distract, another eye opens. And looks. One world fades and another emerges.

One morning I heard a thwacking sound from the campsite across from ours. A boy of 9 or 10 had taken an ax and was hacking at a low branch of one of the cottonwoods. I felt the sound in my body like a blow. I went over and explained that the tree was old and fragile. I found myself using the word "grandmother," for the trees had come to seem like elderly people.

His own grandmother came out of their camper and looked at me warily. They were just trying to get a little wood to start a fire, she said. The boy didn't mean any harm. I suggested they forage for firewood a little ways off. Dead wood. If this tree died, I asked her, what would provide shade? She hadn't thought of that.

The tree now safe, silence returned. Lizards came to sun themselves on low branches, to nibble at things beneath the picnic table. I watched the way they flicked their tongues, the way their eyes moved under hooded lids, the tiny perfection of their fingers, their milky blue tails.

Once this land was enchanted. Animals spoke to the people, and the people learned from them. I stared at the lizard, the slow pulsing of his neck. What could I learn from lizard?

How to keep still and watch, how to move quickly when necessary. How to merge with surroundings. How to climb skillfully. I thought of lizard as I hiked up from the canyon later that day, the sun on my shoulders like a heavy stone.



Hummingbird came, ruby-throated and ephemeral. She hung in the air like a wish, like a fleeting thought. Pay attention, she said, travel lightly. Carry no burdens. Defy gravity.

I amused myself like this. The days floated by.

One day I took a longer walk than usual, then cut down to the river for some blessed relief. There stood an enormous cottonwood, larger than any I had seen at the campground. It would have taken three of me to stretch my arms around it. People once worshiped trees, and seeing this one, I could understand why. The sheer size of it, the force of its presence. Its enormous stillness.

I thought of its roots, reaching deep into the earth. How deep, I couldn't imagine. Its great branches fingered the sky, so it seemed that heaven and earth held hands through this tree. When Indians occupied this area, when the earth and everything in it was sacred, this tree had been young. Now it bore witness, like a great elder, to all that had passed.

I felt moved by the tree, its faithfulness. Its wisdom. Its connection to that earlier time. I put my hands up to touch it, to honor it. So many things I could learn from this tree! Steadfastness. Patience. How to live deeply in one place.

As I pressed my palms against the tree's ropery bark, I felt a pulsing in my right hand, then in my left. The pulse grew stronger and stronger, until I felt it all through my body. It was as if I were feeling the tree's great heartbeat, the blood in my own body pounding a response. I closed my eyes, and everything seemed to move toward a center, like the night sky does when you stare at it too long, moving, moving toward a great vortex, everything connected, the tree, myself, the sagebrush, the lizards, the babbling river, all part of one great pulsing being. This, I saw now, was what the tree had to teach me. I stood there for a long moment, everything around me alive and shimmering. The words *holy holy* thrummed in my ears, filled my mouth.





DEAD PALM TREES

Tina Murray

Printmaker and gallery-owner Devon Harvey stared up at the withered treetops. Two weeks ago the three dead cabbage palms had stood close to fifty feet high. Now the once-green and upright fronds at the apex of each tree were hanging limp, brown, and dried. The trunk of the tallest tree was burned, its frazzled, criss-crossed bark dangling in loose shreds. Even the squared-off hedge shrub at its base was singed and lifeless.

Devon raised his left hand and shielded his shrewd brown eyes from the laser rays of morning sun. Standing tall, thin, and swarthy, the man echoed the lifeless giants rising beside him. Neck craned, feet together, he stood on the black asphalt of his short driveway and continued to contemplate the tree-tops, which were framed against the backdrop of azure sky and grand, white cumulus clouds. Only a caprice of Fate had saved him from the blast—caprice or Master Plan.

He bowed his head and shifted to *contrapposto*. With his right deck shoe, Devon kicked at a stray piece of wood debris. Still falling. He remembered the large pile of shredded brown bark which had strewn the driveway that Saturday two weeks earlier. Many small pieces had scattered that day, across and beyond the driveway; many had exploded out into the bricked street of the condominium courtyard, some landing as far away as the tiered fountain.

Today the fountain water tinkled steadily, but Devon, accustomed to the sound, did not notice. The condo's contracted landscape-maintenance workers were due to arrive, hauling with them the buzz saws and the stump grinder. The workers were running late, of course. Thoughts of the gallery flashed in Devon's mind as he waited. At least he had weathered the fraud lawsuit last month. Forget it, he told himself. Focus on creating. He drew a deep breath of humid sea air laced with jasmine fragrance.

The cell phone in Devon's pocket vibrated. He answered.

"Are we still meeting or what, Devon?" she asked, her speech clipped, her attitude breezy. "I'm waiting here at Zeke's. Breathe in. Can't you smell the espresso?"

"No."

"Hurry or they'll want the table back."

Devon's brown eyes again flew to the treetops. "Yeah, sure." Out of habit, he drove his deep voice into the tiny phone. "Sure, babe."

"We need to come to some kind of agreement right away," insisted the female voice in the cell. "Especially about the studio. I don't care about the *Hasty Lady*—or the slip. They're yours."



"Yeah, okay," answered Devon. "I'll be there soon. Hang. Keep a scone warm."

He turned off the cell and returned it to his pocket. He was glad they could still joke together. Standing in the driveway, Devon scanned the scene before him—the pearl and pastel-colored buildings of the surrounding condos, the blossoming hedgerows of the manicured grounds, the lush mahoganies and potent palms lining the street—then, in front of his unit, the dead trees, the ravaged trunk.

He would have been there, he realized. His SUV would have been parked right there, on the very spot, if he hadn't gone that day. What if he hadn't gone?

Because he had gone his second marriage was in shambles. But if he hadn't gone he could have been stepping out of the vehicle right at the moment of impact. In a blinding tropical thunderstorm, he would have been taken up in the lightning blast, which, according to his neighbors, had produced an enormous, amorphous, *sudden* explosion of sound and light. Why, he wondered, not for the first time, had he been spared?

Julia had moved out that night, right after he'd returned and confessed, or been caught, or whatever you wanted to call it. He had wanted her to know. He'd had to clear the driveway of debris before she could back her red Vespa out of the garage. He recalled watching the single red taillight disappearing into the wet darkness.

The next day, stepping through puddles, he'd filled three garbage bags with shredded bark. He hadn't wanted to wait for the condo association to act. He'd been restless, agitated. At first he thought that only one tree had been killed by the lightning bolt. But, over the next few days, the fronds of the other two trees had started to shrivel. So he knew. Over the next two weeks he had watched the dessication continue, even as he adjusted to living alone—and here he was. Fleeting, he wondered what had become of Stan.

Devon was glad the trees would be removed today. A hurricane was spinning westward. Right now it was east of the Leeward Islands, hurtling toward him and his dead palm trees. If the cyclone bore down before the trees were removed, the wind could uproot the trees and toss them onto the garage roof. Bad for the Spanish tile, to say the least, but even worse for the Mercedes inside.

He grimaced and shook his head. Lightning strikes and approaching hurricanes, and she wanted to drink lattes and debate who gets what. So like her, he decided, running his hands through his curly, salt-and-pepper hair. That's why he wanted out. That and the sex. She would never have what he wanted now.

He'd never told her that he wanted out; but he knew that she'd suspected all along, and so he confessed and that way she had been able to make the first move and rescue her dignity. Suppose he had been killed by the lightning? Would she have cared? Suppose he'd been fried like the now-yellowed



and rubbery leaves of the shrub? A half an hour earlier and he would have been.

Devon glanced at his heavily insured wristwatch. He would see that the workers were disciplined. The power had gone out. That's why he had stayed longer, waiting for the downpour to end—that and so he could steal a few more moments. What if he had remembered to take his umbrella? Decided to make a dash for the car? He would have arrived home at the moment of impact. He would have been electrocuted and Julia would never have known.

He hadn't seen his wife since that night. She had found herself a new place yesterday and called him. She planned to return for her things over the coming weekend—with movers, guys she had known before he'd met her that day at the pier. She'd been posed against the railing, sketching Stan while he fished—the day before the horrific fireworks catastrophe. Suppose they had all visited the pier a day later? Another inexplicable twist of fate.

Did that mean he'd done the right thing, then? If his coarse action had saved him from death? Even though what he'd done was wrong, callous, possibly even illegal? The doing of it, the wallowing in it, the relish may have saved his life. Not to mention his vehicle's electrical systems. He had heard from the condo president that a fellow in another building had lost a car that way, to irreparable damage. He'd ask his mechanic when picking up the SUV from the shop tomorrow.

Somewhere across the lake a lawn mower started up. A bee buzzed around Devon's head then flew away. Life was full of menace, so why exacerbate danger? Devon pondered. Danger. Danger. What would life be without danger? Danger took many forms. He himself certainly did not run from it. That night he had run directly into its arms.

Sometimes ignorance was danger. He didn't know why people planted tall trees in Florida. Florida was the lightning capital of the world, and July was the worst month. He'd heard there'd been a giraffe killed at a zoo to the north. Giraffes were not indigenous to Florida and, to his mind, there was a reason why. Poor creature.

Devon's cell phone vibrated again. This time he ignored it. It vibrated, nagging, but he didn't care. He looked up at the bright, blue sky and studied the position of the three dead trees in relation to the faint moon, which was still visible in the early morning sky. He framed the scene in his mind's eye. *Spectre of death come unto me*, he mused. The creepy lines ran through his head.

He tried to imagine the giant bolt of energy, the electrified hand of the Divine, reaching down from the stormy, gray heavens, contact bringing instant death to the fragile living things of the trembling earth. How would the shock of merciless wrath feel as it passed through a man on its path toward fleshy ground? *If you felt anything at all...*



To what end, he wondered, shuddering. The trees had harmed no one, they were blameless, innocent, while he himself was guilty, selfish, despicable. Why had he been spared, even protected, from electrocution? From every disaster? Why? Why?

What did it mean? That his work as an artist was significant?

The really odd thing, Devon acknowledged, frowning, was that a bolt of lightning had struck his next-door-neighbor's palms not long ago. His neighbor's two trees had stood not thirty feet away, just across the shared driveway. Those trees had been removed and replaced with smaller trees. Lightning was rumored never to strike twice in the same place. But it had, or damned close. Now his own trees had been hit—almost as though the first strike had been a miss. For several minutes he stood lost in thought.

The cell vibrated again. This time Devon answered, slowly. "Hello?"

"I'm coming over there, Dev," she announced. "You obviously can't get your act together, as usual, and I want to talk."

"Okay, talk." He glanced toward the heavens.

"No. I want to see you," she said.

"Why?" asked Devon, staring upwards at the floating clouds. Devon's gaze fell to the dessicated palm fronds and hovered there. An airplane droned into the frame.

"I've been having second thoughts," she said, between sips of hot milk and coffee. "I think maybe I forgive you."

He did not respond.

"Dev?"

"I've just had an idea for a piece," Devon whispered, lowering the phone from his ear. His gaze fell upon the burned bush. Reaching out, he plucked a withered leaf from the pitiful plant and cradled the leaf in the palm of his right hand. Entranced, he could not hear the faint voice calling from the cell phone which he still held in his left hand. As long as he had Art, nothing else mattered.

Raising his sights to the treetops, Devon calculated. Perhaps the composition would be more balanced if the moon were higher in the corner of the picture plane. Carefully, he shifted his position, stepping forward. Caught up in inspiration, he circled around the trees and stepped backwards into the street. He did not see or hear the workers' truck as it barreled down upon him.





A tree never hits an automobile except in self-defense.
—*American Proverb*



DEATH OF A DOUGLAS FIR

Arlene G. Levine

One
hundred years
and fifty feet, gone.
Gone in the time it took for the screech
of the saw to awaken me from a bad dream,
gone before I could shower, dress and eat breakfast
though, Lord knows, I had no appetite.
What makes people destroy something beautiful,
healthy and so deserving of care?
All that magnificence gone,
slashed for a sunny front window.
There's an empty space in the skyline where
deep green branches used to sway, loving arms
ready to receive anything, including the burden of
unhappy days when I'd sit and pour
my heart out to this awesome being who seemed
to bend its boughs and nod, "Yes, I know how it is.
I too have seen such sorrow in all these many years.
Be like me. Bow to any breeze. You will not break."
But now you are gone and who will listen?



TRIMMING THE TREE

Arlene G. Levine

Christmas Eve present
A crescent moon decorates
the oak's bare branches





DECIDUOUS PINE



Barbara Brooks

Heather moved into the house on Barrow Road in January, and in March The Tree Man came to her door. She watched him from an upstairs window as he parked his truck in her driveway and lumbered up the gravel walk, all sandy-haired and sun-tanned and looking proud of his five-pound, muddy boots and his tubular forearms. He wore a chamois work shirt the color of buttercups and carried a clipboard. From around his waist swung various tools and other appendages that clanged like a wild mating call. The Tree Man had the look of a young Robert Redford, whispering now to trees instead of horses, and Heather lost sight of him as he clomped up onto her porch. She imagined him though, scrubbing the dirt from the treads of his boots onto her brand new doormat, whose price tag was still tucked under one corner. When she heard the bell, she tied her robe on over her pajamas and headed down the stairs to meet him.

Having moved so recently from her apartment in the city, Heather found it funny that no doorman would announce her visitor over an intercom. She found it odd that The Tree Man, or any man for that matter, could just stroll up to her front door and peek in through the glass pane at her new rugs and hardwood floors, at her hundred-year-old walls soaked in dark paint colors like oxblood red and forest green. Deeper colors than any landlord of hers had ever allowed. She wondered how it was that a total stranger could look in over her shoulder at the pictures of her, as a baby, as a bride, that hung on the wall behind her, leading up the staircase to her bedroom, where her bed sat under a big window across from the door.

"Hello, Ma' am," said The Tree Man when Heather opened the door. "Are all these beautiful trees yours?"

"So to speak," she said. "I live here, but I don't know much about the trees."

Heather's yard was filled with trees—marvelous trees, curious trees—trees whose beauty and quiet wisdom rooted her to married life in the suburbs while her husband traveled, and also when he was home. In the front yard alone, there were 35 trees. Heather knew that because on the November day she and Owen came to look at the house for the first time, she had stood on the porch and counted them in a whisper, while he was inside, checking the water pressure and the condition of the copper pipes. She had bowed her head slightly as she acknowledged each tree: those in a dense clump, *eight, nine, ten*; a long double row, *sixteen, eighteen, twenty*; several evenly spaced trees marking the perimeter of the yard, *twenty-six, twenty-seven*; and one, *thirty-five, that* stood alone, 20 yards to the left of



the porch. To Heather, the trees looked like dancers; their orange and red and brown leaves rustling like ball gowns when the wind blew.

"Honey, are you sure?" Owen had asked when she said she wanted to buy the house. "You've barely been upstairs."

"This is the one," she had said. "I feel Maris here." Her aunt, a dancer, had been dead nearly a year and the money she left to Heather would just about pay for the house.

Heather stepped out onto the porch and felt the damp morning air on her face and through her flannel robe that was decorated with clouds and coffee cups. It was just eight-thirty, but she could already tell it was the kind of day that would tease her with two hours of almost-warm air in the middle of the afternoon, when she could wear loafers without socks, or go jogging in shorts, or drive with her convertible top down, provided she cranked the heat up high. The warmer air was such a relief after many months of wearing scratchy wool against dry, winter skin, but Heather couldn't fully appreciate, or even imagine, the subtle signs of life that had lain dormant until that very morning. The squirrels scampered across slightly softer ground, the blue jays squeezed their scrawny toes around branches whose buds were just beginning to bubble up from under the surface of the bark.

Heather hadn't actually called for The Tree Man, but she had seen his truck in the driveways of other people's houses; she'd wondered what exactly a Tree Man might do, whether he worked alone. Whether there were any Tree Women or Tree Boys. She realized that this year, and for many years to come, The Tree Man would take the place of the window washer who had raised and lowered himself on a scaffold outside her eighth-floor window in the city, to wipe away the dirty water stains that each winter had stood between her and clear vision. Here, it would be The Tree Man who would help her welcome spring. She wondered how the Tree Man would climb? What would the Tree Man think about when he was perched in the leafy bush? Who would be there to hold the bottom of the ladder? Was the Tree Man ever afraid?

"You do have some mighty nice trees." He winked when he said that, as though what he really said was "You have mighty nice legs," or "mighty nice eyes," but then he turned away from Heather and looked out at the dancing pine trees. "Since you're new here, I thought I could tell you about them."

"Sort of like introducing me to my neighbors," Heather said. She liked the sound of that. She had moved into the house in the dead of winter and with all the ice and snow, she hadn't met anyone yet. Trees, she thought, would make better friends anyway, compared to the smug mothers she'd seen huddled next to their idling Suburbans, talking to each other long after their kids had boarded the school bus. If they're all such good friends, she wondered, why don't they go inside and talk, in front of a big fire with cappuccino and a tray of croissants?



Heather remembered that she had a fresh pot of coffee inside so she offered some to The Tree Man, who said, "Yes, thank you very much, I believe I would love a cup." She went inside and came back to the porch with two.

"I didn't introduce myself," he said, and he extended his hand to shake hers. In the awkward moment when both of Heather's hands were full, and his hands were empty, she giggled and passed him one of the cups.

"Nor did I," Heather said. She told him her name, but he only said, "I'm The Tree Man," as though there weren't big white letters on the side of his red truck; as though she'd be standing on her porch on a Saturday morning in her bathrobe talking about her trees with anybody else. She took his warm, sandpapery hand, and saw that his nails were buffed and he wore a silver Navajo bracelet around one of his wide wrists. The Tree Man's eyes were the green of a newly seeded lawn and Heather longed for a real spring day.

So while her husband was en route to Los Angeles for a conference, Heather stood out on their porch and had coffee with The Tree Man, conducting a sort of interview, imagining that perhaps she'd engage him to do some important work in their yard. This would be bold, even remarkable, in light of her total inexperience with such things. True, she had hired occasional maids to clean their apartment in the city, but they had always come highly recommended by someone down the hall. Heather remembered Gloria, the last one, sweet and eager-to-please for a few months but lax and ornery over time. She squeezed the collar of her robe tight around her neck and breathed in a chestful of air.

"I don't deserve all this you know," she said. In 15 years, Heather hadn't owned one square inch of West End Avenue, and yet there she stood, looking out at four acres of land she had bought outright, using every penny of an inheritance she never expected. But Maris would've loved this house. And the trees.

"Don't sweat it," said The Tree Man, and he smiled. "Everyone of us is living on borrowed land." He sounded not like a gardener but rather a philosopher, and Heather figured that soon he'd be talking about eternity and letting handfuls of dirt trickle through his fingers. Owen would hate this guy.

"Come with me," The Tree Man said. He closed his large hand around her elbow and escorted Heather off the porch and around the property. She followed his pointer finger with her eyes and her ears but retained very little of what he said because it was like being at a wedding where your date knows everyone and you know no one, and he introduces you to people all night long who are all somehow related and have the same two or three last names. Only in this case it's worse because all the names are Latin, and they rhyme.



Then The Tree Man stopped in front of the one solitary tree—it was statuesque and bare—and he lowered his voice as though he was gossiping about an old great-aunt whose cancer was getting the better of her.

"This tree here is very ill," he said. He hugged his clipboard to his chest and bowed his head. "It hurts my heart just to look at her."

"Really?" Heather asked. "Ill? How ill?"

"She's dead," he whispered. He reached over as though to console Heather, but with his hands full, all he could do was rest his coffee cup on her shoulder.

"How do you know?"

"She was an evergreen," he said. "Ever. Green. Get it?"

Heather looked up at the brittle branches and wondered why evergreen couldn't also mean everlasting. What if her Aunt Maris, frail and bone tired, had been forced to stand up all winter long in the cold, without her housecoat, rather than lying down on her cherry bed, or in her coffin, with her head propped up on a satin pillow. It seemed too cruel, too disrespectful, not to take this sick woman down; let her rest in peace. Owen would have to agree. Weren't they both card-carrying organ donors? Hadn't they just signed do-not-resuscitate provisos in their living wills?

So Heather and The Tree Man agreed on the arrangements. He would be back the next day, with two other men, the shears, the chain saw and the wood chipper, and the men would take down the tree. When it was time, Heather would sprinkle her remains around the perimeter of the property and over the roots of the other trees.

Heather, barefooted, still in her robe, walked the Tree Man back to his truck. She loved the way the gravel stung the bottoms of her feet, and when she said goodbye, it seemed more natural to hug him than to shake his hand because, after all, they had just made a joint decision about the proper care of an elder. The Tree Man didn't feel like family exactly, but rather more like an undertaker who has just put a widow's mind to rest by promising a dignified service. Heather refrained, but she noticed that her cheek reached only to the middle of The Tree Man's chest, which, she thought, might have felt like a soft bed of pine needles, had she rested her head against it. Heather heard her phone ring four times and stop. She didn't check the machine because she wanted to take care of this herself. She could tell Owen about it later.

Back inside the house, Heather found her phone book and her journal, and she spent the rest of the day calling the members of her women's group, and researching forest folklore on the Internet. She found golden trees and iron trees, trees that grew ruby fruits. There were speaking trees, singing trees, sacred trees and trees that sprang up to receive unhappy souls. There was a withered tree that had been



cut down three times, but always burst into bloom again. There were trees that gave life, and trees that took it away.

Heather called her midwife friend Babe who drove up from Brooklyn to help organize the memorial service they would have that night for their old tree-woman mother-friend, who Heather had anointed "Gladys," because it was such an old-sounding name, and because Heather was glad to have known her, even for just a few months.

"This shouldn't be a somber ceremony," Babe said as she stood at the base of the dead pine tree. "I still feel life here."

That evening, as darkness fell and an almost-full moon climbed high over the treetops, a parade of openhearted women arrived in carpools, carrying feminine symbols of respect. Around the base of the tree, they set up candles and bowls full of earth and eggs and ripe fruits of all kinds, and chocolate, and incense, and musky smelling oils. They knew what to do because they had gathered on countless occasions in the past, to honor full moons and passings and rebirths of many kinds, usually on a rock in Central Park or on the sooty tar rooftop of someone's apartment building. This was the first time they sat on soft earth that belonged to one of them.

"We're here to honor Gladys," Babe chanted, and each woman, one at a time, repeated her name. "Gladys. Gladys. Gladys." When it was Heather's turn, she choked on tears and mumbled "Maris," but no one could tell the difference, and after her, they continued around the circle: "Gladys. Gladys. Gladys."

"For tomorrow morning, she will be transformed," said Babe.

Then other women tossed out their own words. "Transferred. Translocated. Transfigured. Transgressed."

For three hours, thirteen women sat in a moonlit circle around the base of the tree, drinking pink wine, singing and laughing and talking softly about mythology and beauty and nature, and about how even trees have souls, until the subject turned to aging and death and how their own bodies had begun to sag. Not just for Heather but for everyone of the lost and lonely women sitting cross-legged on the soft earth, Gladys became a symbol of the grandmothers and mothers and sisters and daughters—the selves—who they either never had or had taken for granted. Some of the women wept, and then, to conclude the ceremony, Babe passed around a tub of pine-scented massage cream, and they all took turns rubbing it into each other's hands and feet.

It was nearly two in the morning when the women wrapped their arms around Gladys, and around Heather, and around each other, and said goodbye. In threes and fours, they climbed back into their cars, where lucky back-seat passengers would slumber with their heads on each other's shoulders.



Heather, alone, blew out all the candles and carried in the blankets and the wine glasses, and that night, she slept in the guest room of her empty house, so when she looked out into the crisp white light of the moon Gladys was the last thing she saw.

In the morning, Heather was awakened by bits of bluestone popping under the heavy weight of The Tree Man's truck tires. The sun was out, and for the first time since she lived in the house, birds were singing. The voice of one bird in particular floated cleanly, as though it lived in its own layer of the atmosphere, above all the trees and bugs and birds, and Heather thought of a long, slow rendition of Taps. All is well? Safely rest, indeed. She pictured John-John in his little-boy shorts—but now he's dead and his mother is too—and she felt sad, and proud, even brave.

Heather brought a pot of coffee and two cups out onto the porch. She turned her wicker double-rocker to face Gladys, as though this were a drive-in movie and she had a date. But the Tree Man, now wearing heavy gloves and kneepads, and a red, white and blue bandanna around his head like a flag, was busy. He paced around the tree and called orders to two limber monkey-men who mounted Gladys, and propelled themselves up her tall body using only a rope and pulley in their hands, and the cleats on the bottoms of their shoes. Heather got up from her chair and paced back and forth across the porch, suddenly not sure she could bear to watch such a crude operation.

Once near the top of the tree, the men began sawing off Gladys' brittle arm branches, which dropped one at a time to the ground, where they bounced and snapped. The men worked quickly, and each time a ten-foot section of the trunk was clean, they sawed through it and then pushed it down to the ground where it landed with a thunderous *whump*. The Tree Man rolled the stumps, one at a time, to the end of the drive. Heather covered her ears to muffle the screams of the wood chipper. Eventually she went inside, up the stairs, and into the dark attic where she lay down on the rough pine planks of the unfinished floor and cried, not only for Gladys, but for Maris, who, with three days left of a world cruise on the Queen Elizabeth 2, played black jack until the tables closed and then went back to her suite, divvied up generous tips for the butler, the purser and the sommelier, and put on fresh lipstick.

Then she mixed herself a hemlock potion with a sherry chaser, and lay down on the bed. Her cancer had spread from her stomach to the toes of her gnarly dancer's feet, but she hadn't told anyone she was sick. Heather saw her off at the pier and two months later received an envelope postmarked Venice that contained the key to her safety deposit box and three words on a piece of note paper from the Cipriani: *buy a house*. Now Heather wished Owen were home to remind her she was doing the right thing, cutting down that tree. For the first time, it occurred to her that maybe she should have gotten a second opinion. Shit, she thought, she didn't even know what all this heartache was costing her.

That's something Owen would do.



After awhile, Heather noticed that the saw had stopped screaming and she went back outside. Wearing black jeans and a black turtleneck, and with her oval sunglasses on, Heather felt a little bit like Jackie O. as she prepared to return the wood chips to the earth. Outside, she found The Tree Man crouched over the ground-level stump that was left of Gladys, examining bubbles of sticky sap that oozed like blood between the raw crevices. He stood up and whirled around when he heard her coming, and dried his hands on his pants.

"Where is everybody?" Heather asked.

"Gone." He had dismissed the workers who took the truck with them. "You okay?"

"I don't know," Heather said. "I didn't expect to feel so awful."

The Tree Man stood up and drew in a deep breath. He put his arm around Heather's shoulder and walked her away from the stump.

"I see it all the time," he said. "Grief can hit you from behind. You want to do the honors?" He motioned to a wheelbarrow full of wood chips.

"Is that all that's left of her?" Heather suddenly couldn't breathe. "What did you do? Where's the rest of her?"

"Gone," he said. "There were *tons* of chips. You couldn't have used them all. It would've taken you three weeks just to spread them around."

Rage welled up in Heather's chest. "But those were mine!" she screamed. "I want them back!"

She pounded her fists into The Tree Man's chest, hitting him as hard as she could until he pinned her arms at her sides and crouched down so he had her eye-to-eye.

"Hey, hey, little lady," he said laughing. "That was a tree, remember?"

"Get out of here, you jerk," she said. "Fuck you. You started this. You said she was sick. You started it. I didn't know a fucking *thing* about that tree until yesterday."

That night, a few of the women from her group stopped by to pay their respects with food and bottles of wine, and Babe, awfully serious all of sudden, brought a *National Geographic* book on trees, which she slipped into the bookcase. They all sat on the porch surrounded by votive candles and mourned in the quiet. Nobody said much, having said all there was to say the night before. It wasn't strange that Heather was so quiet: that she didn't tell them that after she pounded on The Tree Man's chest they had sat in the grass awhile, then kissed: that eventually, in her grief, she'd let him lead her upstairs and into her bed. And that it wasn't until after she was undressed and he was inside her that she remembered that sex never could be a cure for grief, even when the guy looks like Robert Redford and all you're really mourning is a damn tree.



That night, the tree book stayed closed, which was a good thing, because in her fragile state Heather couldn't have borne chapter three, which Babe had read and which revealed that the bubbles of sap were actually signs of life, that Gladys hadn't been a dead pine but rather a very rare and precious deciduous pine—the kind whose needles shed every autumn and then grow back in the spring. One of the women suggested they could seal the raw stump-wound with wax, so they all (except Babe) carried candles down to Gladys and kneeled around her. They dripped hot paraffin into 200 years worth of rings that were etched like wrinkles into the stump's surface. When the wax cooled, everyone went home and Heather went upstairs and pulled her bedroom door closed without looking inside. She got her sleeping bag down from the attic and brought it out into the front yard, where she slept on a bed of crisp white linens laid out by the moon.

On Monday morning, the phone rang.

"Jesus, Heather," said Owen. "Where the hell have you been? How come you haven't called me back?"

Only then did Heather realize that she had been so wrapped up all weekend that except for coffee and a mango she hadn't really eaten anything much, or checked the message machine, or even fed the fish. She'd wanted to call him the night before, but she stopped herself; afraid she couldn't possibly explain what she'd been through. She thought if she waited a day or two, maybe she could just not tell him about Gladys at all. Maybe he wouldn't notice the stump in the yard.

But when Heather heard Owen's voice, most of the story came pouring out: The Tree Man and the dead tree that became her aunt Maris, and her friends and the service, and the horrible sound of the saw. And then Gladys, disfigured and dismembered, filed down to just a stump, and the fight over the wood chips, and the hot wax, and the backache she had now from sleeping in the yard because she felt so guilty about it all.

On Wednesday night, Owen came home after midnight to find Heather sitting on the living room floor sorting through old family photos. A storm had delayed his flight.

"Hi, Sweetie," he said sitting down next to her. "I've been worried about you." He kissed her cheek and she handed him a picture of Maris.

"Wasn't she beautiful?" Heather said.

"Yeah." He looked at the photo for a few seconds and then he looked up at her.

"You okay?"

"No," she said. "I'm a total mess." Her curly hair fell across her face and she tried a half-smile.

"Hey," Owen said. "Hold that pose. Right like that you totally look like her."



"Who?"

"Maris."

"You think?"

"Yeah," he said, "I do."

"Hmmm." She handed him a few other favorites. Pictures of Maris taken after the war, in Paris, and in Monte Carlo.

"Aren't you tired?" he said.

"No," she said, shaking her head. "I'm still really sad."

"About the tree?"

"I don't know," she said. "About life. About how we get old. About how we change our minds about things, or take them back, or just forget what we said." She heard trees rustling in the wind and rain outside. "Listen."

She got up and followed the sound over to the window. She cupped her hands around her eyes and leaned against the glass, but it was too dark outside to see anything.





DREAM FOREST



Carol Carpenter

I dream myself awake
in this misted forest,
caressed by fog's fingertips.
I rub face against bark,
wrinkle to wrinkle. Every crease
of flesh and wood converge. We
speak in oak and ash, the way
lovers merge. I nest
in your lowest branch,
fluff leaves not yet rusted
orange-brown or dried to dust.



Here I rest, cradled
in your gnarled arms. Droplets of mist
collect in cupped leaves,
bowls of nectar we sip
together. We embrace
in this quiet space.
I listen to
the rustle of you
who know autumn days
break early and wane.

Explain, if you will,
why your branches flutter
in wind while I sway,
lulled by whistling breezes.
A few moist green leaves cling,
not ready for the fall.
They brush my cheek, whisper
of seeds, the growing time
come spring when you bud again.



Our roots grow deep
in solid ground. Our bodies
sweat sweet melodies,
as each note rises, drops
with songs of us.
We reach for moon,
a slice of light to hold
as tunes blanket us
this warm night of fog.

Owls hoot their eerie sound:
who, who, who drapes mist
like a white shawl
warming bare shoulders?
Who will wear my wing
feather full of flight
in her onyx hair?
Who walks among trees
in dense, wet air?

I do, I answer.
I dream each tree,
each forest, each night as I sleep.
When I wake to day, night sounds
echo in my heart, rattle my soul
until I breathe in night truth,
exhale a cloud of fog,
a royal cloak for trees.





A tree uses what comes its way to nurture itself.
That is the secret of the tree.
—*Deng Ming-Dao*



DREAMCATCHER

Chip Livingston

Peter couldn't keep up with his cousin on the basketball court and was driving Wilma crazy around the house. His cast made it awkward to help Poocha in his garden. It was summer and powwow season. The cast was hot and Peter's leg itched beneath the plaster bandages. Peter couldn't dance and was bored sitting in the bleachers. He sat shifts with Granny Weave, watching her fingers dart quickly through the loom. Granny worked metronomically. On blankets, baskets, dreamcatchers—whatever people ordered. Her fingers, a bow over fiddle strings, were her prayers as they strung stories. Granny talked with folks she hadn't seen in a season. She listened as they told their stories, and their stories appeared in her weavings in colors, her fingers manifesting their dreams. Reds, blues, yellows. She would bring a supply of previously made goodies with her but they sold out quickly. Then she worked per order on whatever piece came next.

Granny knew Peter was disappointed that he couldn't dance or goof around with the others. He sat beside her, using one of her idle knives, whittling oak limbs into skinnier and skinnier sticks.

The next Monday, Granny called over to Wilma's. "Peter," she said. "Come over and see me."

"Sure Granny, but you know I'm lame. I can't do much work."

"Peter," she said firmly. "I need you to come over and see me."

He went to see her. Poocha was outside his garden, burning trash.

Peter dug his crutches into the plow-softened earth, swung his body over new red potato hills, swamp cabbage, and collard greens, squeezing between stalks of black-eyed peas and white and yellow corn. Squash and watermelons grew on wild runners, and Peter shambled over to his grandfather and leaned in for a one-armed hug.

"It's good to see you," Poocha said. "How's your leg holding up?"

"It's fine. How's yours?"

"Heheh," Poocha laughed. "Boy's getting smart with his old grandfather, aye? Now you see you're lucky. You could be lame for good like me. Be thankful that it was only a break and not torn away from you."

"Yes sir." Peter nodded and shifted his weight. "Did you have to use crutches?" He shied his eyes from the smoke that seemed to follow him when he edged around the fire.

"Oh sure," his grandpa said. "I was on crutches for over a year after they finally let me out of that dad-bum wheelchair. And it was several years before I learned to use this wooden leg."



"It's not wooden," Peter insisted. Junior high school was teaching him realism.

"Plastic, metal, wood," Poocha said. "I like to think of it as wood, seems more natural. Your granny's inside waiting. You better get in there and come see me later."

At that moment Granny Weave marched from the house with a bag hanging at her hip. He'd seen Poocha wear the big burlap sack around his shoulder when he took Peter and his cousin Jimbo to the bay to seine for mullet. Peter imagined Granny Weave wading in the water, her skirt shrink-wrapped around her tiny frame.

"How's your leg?" she asked.

Before Peter could answer, she hurried him, "Come." Granny Weave headed for the woods.

Peter struggled to keep up with her, but once they were out of sight of his grandfather, Granny eased into a more thoughtful pace. She told Peter she needed him to help her. She was getting old now and no one knew how to make the dreamcatchers like she did. She said she was going to teach him.

"First we have to find the willow," she said. "I don't use the wild grape vines, though Lord knows their plentiful, and I certainly don't use those store-bought cross stitch hoops. It's the medicine in the willow that attracts the dreams, catches the prayers."

Peter hobbled beside her. "There's one," he said, pointing his right crutch toward a large tree, its branches arcing over a stream, and they walked in that direction.

"This is a fine one," Granny said, standing beneath it. She looked up. The sun, fragmented into bright diamonds, sparkled through a starburst of branches. "This one will be perfect to start with."

Granny Weave hitched a hunting knife from under her skirt and pulled a medicine bag from around her neck. She emptied tobacco from the pouch into her hand. She spoke Indian to the tobacco, and to the tree. Peter didn't understand the old language, but he knew what she was doing. She was asking permission to pare the tree's branches. She was thanking it for its medicine. The willow didn't debate her, and Granny handed the pouch to Peter.

"I don't have the words," he said.

"Nonsense," Granny replied. "You think this tree doesn't understand English? You have to learn to speak your prayers out loud, Peter. Get what's in your heart out to share. No playing 'possum."

Peter looked to Granny Weave and then the tree. "Grandmother Willow," he awkwardly began. "I'm giving you this tobacco for your branches." His thirteen-year-old voice broke, and he swallowed. "Thanks for growing here with us." He sprinkled the tobacco at its roots as Granny had done.

"That was perfect," Granny said, handing him the knife. "See," she winked. "Nothing to worry about. Don't let the cat get your tongue. Now close your eyes and imagine the branch you want. How thin, how long. Then, when you see it in your mind, open your eyes and look for the branch you saw. "



Peter did as his granny said and when he opened his eyes, he found the perfect limb. He hopped around the tree on his good leg, leaned against the crutches and stretched to grab hold of the high drooping branch. Granny Weave steadied him, nodding her approval, and Peter cut the branch off with one slice of the sharp knife.

Granny Weave smiled. "You did just right," she said. "You always want to angle your blade and cut up the trunk toward the top. It heals better that way." She took the knife, closed her eyes and found her own perfect branch.

Granny Weave put both limbs in the potato sack. "We'll follow the stream to find other trees," she said. "We'll both take just one branch from each willow. Save some for next time. By the way," she said. "Do you remember what this creek is called?"

Peter shook his head. He felt a lesson coming.

"I can't recall it either just now," Granny said "Ask your Poocha when we get home. It comes off that creek they all used to bathe in."

In a few hours, Granny's bag was full of branches. She tied yellow yarn around the ends of hers to distinguish them from Peter's. They walked slowly home, Granny Weave pointing out plants and medicines along the way. She took an inventory of what she had at home, made mental notes of where to come back to collect certain things, even though she knew these woods by heart.

Back outside the house, Poocha slept in a hammock under the pecan trees by the front porch. A brown U-Haul hat covered his face. Granny hurried them past so they wouldn't wake him. In the backyard, a plastic baby pool was sunk into the ground. Once rich blue, the edges now were faded turquoise in the sun. Dark green algae and leaves turned the water brown. The makeshift pond was home to tadpoles and mosquito larvae. Minnows had been transplanted to the pool through rain, and Granny said they'd soak the willow there for several days. Get it soft and limber. She slid the branches in the pond stirring up a murky green into the brown. Peter imagined Granny stirring a big pot of stew. She asked him if he was hungry, and Peter's stomach growled. He made his way behind her to the kitchen.

A few days later, alone again with Peter, Granny Weave showed him how to gently work the willow branches into circles without breaking them. They wrapped the ends together and tied them with sinew.

"This is the real thing," Granny said. "Not imitation. Not waxed nylon. This is gut right from the deer."

Peter started to ask her if she made the string. He could imagine Granny's hands up inside the deer's belly, blood still hot and acrid smelling, as it hung from an oak or big pine tree where Poocha or Uncle Wren would gut and carve it. The blood safe and warm.



"I buy this sinew at the powwow," Granny said. "I'm tough but I still get a little queasy with my hands in all that blood. It's the real thing though, even if I didn't cure it myself. I buy it, or sometimes I'll trade for it—just for old time's sake. It ain't expensive. Of course in the old days you made it yourself. Had to do everything yourself."

"You're not so old that you remember all those things you talk about," Peter said. Granny Weave smiled. "Oh, I can remember things way back," she said.

They wrapped the branches and hung them on her clothesline from wooden clothespins. As the hoops dried, Granny explained, the wood got tight. That made them easier to work with. "A loose loom won't hold the weave," she said. "Those bad dreams can slip right through."

Peter was back at Granny Weave's a few days later. As instructed, while waiting for the willow to dry, he had spent the days crutch-walk hopping around the farm, in the woods, everywhere he could think to find feathers. He had a large collection when he returned to Granny's. She asked him to name the feathers he'd found, and he knew she was proud when he guessed some of them right.

They gathered the willow hoops from the clothesline and moved to the shade of her front porch, Granny Weave in her rocking chair with Peter on a stool beside her. "Pick the person you want to make this for," she said. "Call that person to your mind and think about what you wish for them. Pray for them as you weave."

Peter picked his mother, and selected a hoop he thought appropriate. Granny picked one too, and started by pulling thirteen arm's lengths of sinew, cutting it and folding it into a needle. The sinew was gummy and stuck together, so the folded strands became a single stick. Granny instructed Peter to start with a knot at the top of the hoop.

"Now go over the willow then back through the loop of thread," she said, pulling it tight and letting the next knot rest on the branch about two fingers' widths from the first one. "In a clockwise direction." She showed him as she spoke.

He followed her example, silently for a while. "Granny," he said, "why do we dance backwards?"

"What do you mean?" Granny didn't stop working.

"You know. Counterclockwise. But now we're making these dreamcatchers clockwise."

Granny nodded. "That's a good question," she said, "one I'm glad you asked me. But you know, you should ask your Poocha about that one too. My mom's people danced contrary too, but my dad's people dance clockwise. Ask Poocha why we do it that way here. It'll thrill him you're interested."

"But for now," she said. "Learn this. And I'm teaching you to do it clockwise because that's how I learned to make them. I learned to make these dreamcatchers from a young Ojibwa woman years ago. We used to work together on the shrimp docks in Biloxi."



Granny encouraged Peter around the hoop until he had made a complete lap. "Now do the same thing you've been doing but go through the first stretch of web this time, instead of the willow," she said.

Peter threaded his needle through the first length of sinew stretched from knot to knot and pulled. The web formed an awkward triangle. As he continued around the track, the web began to take shape.

"Pray for the person as you weave," Granny reminded him, and Peter prayed for his mother.

He prayed that her life would be long. He prayed that God would bless her with health and help. He prayed she would find another husband, which surprised him because the thought had never crossed his mind before that she might miss his father. Peter had never imagined that he might have another daddy. He prayed and he wove, getting into a rhythm. Praying and weaving. He prayed with his hands. With his fingers. And before long the familiar pattern materialized. He was doing it. Somehow doing it right.

"Pray specifically," Granny said. "Be careful what you wish for. Prayers are words," she said. "And words are power. Even unspoken ones."

He looked to Granny's hoop and saw that she was far ahead of him, ready and waiting to put a bead or stone in her web. She took the loop from Peter's hands, pulled to see how tight he'd gotten it strung. She handed it back to him and smiled. He was doing well.

Granny rocked forward, stood, then arched her back. It surprised Peter that his grandmother was so limber. Nimble, he thought. She's nimble like Jack in the rhyme. She walked inside the house and returned with an old tackle box Peter recognized from past fishing trips with Poocha. Granny Weave had converted it into a bead box, and now it displayed varieties of glass, clay, and plastic beads, shells and stones in separate compartments that once housed hooks, corks, weights, and sinkers. Feathers lined the bottom under fold-out trays.

"Imagine the person you're praying for," Granny said. "Hold their picture in your mind and pick out the piece that speaks to you."

Peter chose a small round shell with a hole through it. Granny nodded and picked out a chip of greenish limestone she had previously wound with copper wire. She unfolded the thin needle of sinew to thread the strand through the small wire loop. She then remade the needle and tracked another knot along the web. "Like this," she said.

Soon Peter had a shell in his mother's dreamcatcher. They continued weaving, and Granny said he should add to it when ever he felt it was time. It was up to him and the spirit in the willow.

"You know only God can make something perfect," she told him. "You need to make sure you put a mistake somewhere in the pattern, to show you know your place in this world."



Peter asked her how to make a mistake on purpose.

"Oh, just skip a knot," she said. "Or put two knots on one strand of the web. It won't show, not when you're done. And if you're like me, you'll mess up on your own. You won't have to try to make a mistake; you'll just realize you made one and keep right on going."

Peter continued weaving, no longer watching Granny, who had started on a second one. He added a bead, another shell. He prayed. Remembering Granny's instruction, he added the clause *a good man* into his mother's prayer. He forgot about his leg and missing playing basketball with Jimbo at Uncle Wren's. He wove close to the center of the web.

"What do I do now?" he asked. "How do I finish it?"

"Work your way back to the top," Granny said. "We'll tie it up there and add a bead to hang the feather from. Do you know which feather you want to use?"

Peter nodded his head, said the blue jay feather. She smiled and watched him lap around the track. He reached into the tackle box and picked out a plastic pony-bead. He strung the yellow bead and tied a knot.

Granny Weave picked up the dreamcatcher she'd made earlier and showed him how she slipped a feather through the hole in the bead, pulling it tight. "It's important to match the last bead with the feather you want to use. The hole in the bead should be just smaller than the quill. The feather needs to fit tight to stay in place."

Peter looked at the hole in the yellow bead. The blue and black striped wing feather would fit perfectly. He slipped it through the bead and held up the dreamcatcher. "I did it!" he exclaimed.

Granny Weave smiled at him. "You sure did. Your mother will love it."

Before Peter could ask her how she knew who it was for, she spoke again.

"You're not done, Peter. We've got to make up all of these. We'll gift the ones we weave for specific people and sell the other ones at the powwows. You can earn you some Christmas money.

Granny used the same tactics to get her grandchildren to pick up the pecans which littered her yard each fall. Granny would load up Peter, Lana, and Jimbo, their paper grocery sacks full of pecans, and haul them all the way to Renfroe's Nut House in Tallahassee, where they would sell the nuts for "Christmas money."

"Soon you'll be back on your feet and running around," Granny said, "leaving an old woman by herself. You'll forget to pray, forget to weave. I've got to take advantage of you now, while you can't run away."

Peter started to say he wouldn't forget, but Granny cut him off. "But before we start another one," Granny said. "Go ask your Poocha about the way we dance."



Peter nodded. He set the dreamcatcher on the porch.

"And did you ever find out the name of that creek?" she asked.

Peter stood, shaking his head as he reached for his crutches.

"Hold on a minute," she said, reaching down into her box. She pulled out a small plastic bag of tobacco. "Here," she reached out "Give this to your grandpa when you ask him. You need to offer tobacco when you ask an older person to share something with you."

Peter took the bag from Granny Weave.

"And when you come back," she added. "Would you mind bringing me some sweet iced tea?"





ELM



Steven R. Luebke

So think like an tree, he said, but all I
could do was remember the elms of my
childhood marked with large orange Xs that said
this tree is diseased and must be cut down.

I've been watching this elm in my yard two
years as it towers over the lesser
maple and ash trees, drinking in the light,
elbowing aside its comrades, while they
stand content to play the understudies,
showing up every year in hopeful green
robes, knowing no one will ever pay much
attention to them. The nuthatch beeps down
the trunk of only the elm. The blue jays
scream their backyard profanities from its
branches alone. Briefly in fall, perhaps,
the maple's flames engage our jaded eyes.



There, I've already erred, talking about
plants as though canopy were consciousness.
Try again: fifteen feet up, a split limb
grows in two directions. If it breaks off
it will smash my deck, cripple another
tree, or snap in two my daughter's swing set.
And so the elm waits for the tree men to
take it down.

Waits? All it has ever done
is wait, but waiting suggests pause with cause,
anticipation, expectation. Try again.



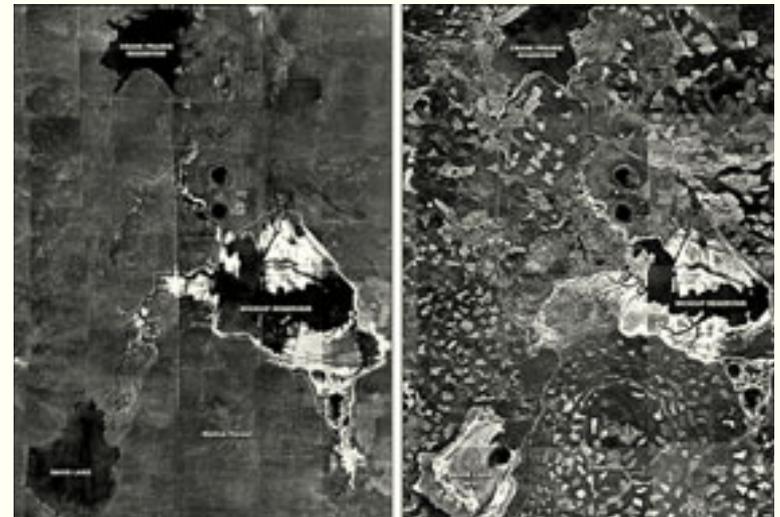
It stands there, oblivious, green
in fall, its limbs thrusting sixty feet up
the sky.

Today I arrive home, notice
extra space in the sky. In the back yard
I see the elm is gone. I count twenty-
two rings on the stump, a small, dry sadness
rippling through me like undulations of
a pool in which a stone is dropped. Twenty-
two burgeoning summers reduced to logs
for burning and chips under children's feet,
sawdust. Pondering the economics
of prudence, I try to prune my regret.





Trees are poems that earth
writes upon the sky. We fell
them down and turn them
into paper. That we may
record our emptiness.
—*Kahlil Gibran*



1951

1995

(clearcutting shown in white areas on right)

Deschutes National Forest, Oregon



EVERGREEN

Richard Heifetz Bernstein

Table

If I unpolished you

Would you be a tree again

And skip with me to the forest?





FAMILY TREES

Lyn Bleiler

Mighty Oaks are silent.
Saplings seldom cry.
Coconut Palms stand up straight.
Redwoods rarely lie.

Spruce are blue and prickly.
Maples thrive on sap.
Magnolias, soft as powder puffs,
Cloud perfume pink when tapped.

Eucalyptus soothes the senses.
Poplars never roam.
Firs return each Christmas.
With logs one builds a home.

So when motherhood comes calling,
And fertile is my womb,
In nursery rows of well-tilled soil
I'll raise my heirs to bloom.





The best friend on earth of man is the tree.
—*Frank Lloyd Wright*



FEBRUARY

J. E. Robinson

These pines—
my pines (at least,
they used to be)—
hijacked and
jack frosted,
smell like
Christmas, complete
with mistletoe.

In
the snow,
the needles,
erect
like grass
or
daffodils
in
the valley,
strike out
to
stab me
like Cupid's
arrows.





FOR A NEIGHBOR WITH CANCER

David Starkey

On Earth Day, Mr. Hill cut down
all the pine trees in his yard.
He stood there in the shadow
of his brick garage, pointing
to the workmen with his cane:
"That big one's mine, too."

I'd known from watching him garden—
pesticides, herbicides and fire—
that he wasn't one to compromise
with unwelcome growing things.
When he planted conservative signs
in his lawn at election time,



he yearned for them to thrive.
But to see the limbs come spinning down
from forty feet above, to hear
the metal whine of needles,
cones and bark ground to sawdust
angered me. Why live in Carolina

if you want to see the sky?
That evening I found him resting
on a stump. The only time we talked
was once a month when he invited us
to church, so he looked surprised,
but pleased—perhaps I'd changed my mind?



"What do you have against ecology?"
I scowled. His pale hand trembled
on the ebony cane. "I'm expanding
my garden. I need more light."
Looking up, his glance stayed fixed
on the patch of blue he'd hacked from wilderness.





If you establish a relationship with it (tree), then you have relationship with mankind. You are responsible then for that tree and for the trees of the world.

—*J. Krishnamurti*



FOXFIRE

Gordon Yaswen

We had all vowed, that night, to steal them; canoes, that is. My college Outing Club was attending the annual convention of similar clubs from other regional campuses. That year it was held on the Motherbunch cluster of small islands on beautiful Lake George, in the Adirondack Mountains. Since we'd arrived late, all the rental canoes had been let out to other clubs, so we were ferried by motorboat to our island campsite. While this was convenient and easy, it ruffled the ideals of independence and hardiness cherished by our members, so we just had to somehow steal some canoes from the other clubs. We didn't consider it criminal, after all, each club had paid for the rentals. Those without boats would be ferried out, and all canoes would be returned to their liveries anyway. Besides, as college-kids we were supposed to pull pranks like that, weren't we?

Night arrived crisp with Autumn cold and replete with all the stars of creation displayed in the uncontaminated darkness above the lake. Everyone was comfortably camped on their various close islands while on the main one, a bonfire was lit. Generators provided some lighting for all the clubs to assemble, eat, and hold a folk-sing. It was an enchanting sight from the water, as we were boated to the assembly. The lit up island's reflections gleamed off the shimmering dark waters like an enchanted isle of fairies. After a motley supper, we sang a motlier collection of collegiate drinking songs, show-melodies, some yet-undiscovered "folk" tunes, and the last vestiges of liberal chants from the radical days of the thirties. This went on until late into the night, when some of our party snuck off to commandeered a few of the canoes beached all about the shores.

Skulking through the brush as silently as I could, I passed a tiny clearing where I noticed a tree-stump beautifully illumined in the moonlight. At the clearings other edge, however, I stopped frozen in my tracks. "What moonlight?" my mind demanded; I had noticed no moon in the inky sky full of stars behind the gleaming island!

I spun about to stare again at the stump which was, indeed, alight in the darkness about it, with no moon, nor light from the assembly, nor even starlight enough to so illumine it. That tree stump was alight on its own and at that moment, my mind was boggled to absorb and believe what I was seeing. Everything I'd been raised to believe was suddenly in question. Each tenet of "scientific" thought and "realism," in which I'd been steeped all my life, was here before me challenged to its core. As I stood there, everything else (for a change) emptied from my thoughts: the canoe I intended to steal, the party, camping trip, college, and my emerging plans for the rest of my life; all gone in an instant. In



their place was a blank space in which any concept could have found fertile soil. If, at that moment, a ring of fairies had begun to dance about the stump playing little flutes; it would have seemed only right and natural. If a small voice out of nowhere had, at that point, whispered "Come with us; we've been waiting for you," I would have docilely trotted along, willing to never again return. This abrupt anomaly of sheer Magic had erupted out of the flat plain of Normality and Hard Facts, and challenged everything my life was founded upon. My heart pounded, but somehow I was not afraid.

However as I continue to stare, slack-jawed, at this icon of possibilities, nothing happened; no ring of fairies, no voice, no enchanted music from other spheres. Gradually, the forest, shores, sounds of the singing, and other realities crept back into my awareness, but the luminous tree stump stubbornly remained also. I spent some time in awed silence there, dumbly trying to integrate these two disparate realities, before finally stumbling on to steal my canoe. When I got back to the campsite, my friends were curious what had taken so long, but I couldn't tell them. The next morning I asked our faculty advisor, a biologist; "Sir, umm, err..."

"Yes, what is it," he replied.

"Is it possible...umm...ahh...for a tree-trunk to...err...glow?" I asked, wincing as I waited for his laughter.

"Oh, yeah," he casually replied, and went back to munching his breakfast.

"But how?" I blurted, unable to control myself any longer. "It's called *foxfire*," he responded matter-of-factly, "a phosphorescent fungus; did you find some?"

So it had name and explanation, and was part of this Earth, after all. I slowly realized that, while my world of Natural Causality and Scientific Thought had just been snatched from the brink of oblivion; something else had been *lost*: a world of romantic possibilities and magic, which it seemed I preferred. I found myself mourning the loss of those few moments I'd experienced with that luminous tree, in which my mind was more completely in awed openness than at anytime, I suppose, since I had discovered my toes in the crib. Over the years it's become obvious that I prefer to witness the world from the viewpoint of a belief in fairies, and "The Voice," and the tree that glowed for no reason. I've never forgotten that tree, nor my wondrous state of mind in that moment.





FREEMAN CREEK GROVE

Paul Willis

(Sequoia gigantea)

Hiking down November snow,
we saw the first one still below us,
mounding up like a juniper
in the Shasta fir and the sugar pine.

Soon the trail entered its presence
(with Thanksgiving a day behind),
the trunk rising in dusky red, in fluted columns
strangely soft to our curious touch.

The first branches began at the tops
of other trees and continued into familiar wonder,
older perhaps than the Incarnation,
and longer rooted, and while they are here,
shedding for us new promise of cones
flung green and small on the white of our steps.

We girdled the trunk with open arms,
unable to circumference it, much less
to find its center. In our random cries,
in the things we said to our wandering children,
I heard proclamation of peace on earth,
a wooden promise kept fresh for millennia,
the inaudible sound of a secret
seed in the South Sierra where eagles
nest in the falling snow.





He who plants a tree plants hope.
—*Lucy Larcom*



FREE-RANGE CHRISTMAS TREES: A NATURAL WILDLIFE FRIENDLY FOREST

Candace Calsoyas

It is the third week in December. The saws stand with remnants of cut trees clinging to their blades. And still people come to cut trees at La Pajarosa tree farm. These last minute tree shoppers have interesting reasons for being late. A couple has just flown in from a tribal meeting in South Africa. A Scandinavian family who decorates with candles wants a very fresh tree. And some just refuse to be rushed into the holiday by department stores and advertisers. Though late in the season and after many trees have been thinned out, the forest remains intact.

Grass in the fields is matted from the many feet wandering through, assessing each tree. Customers are instructed to cut above the white mark on the trunk so that a new sprout will develop. I walk, noticing that the harvesters have carefully cut leaving boas of greenery encircling gleaming trunks. "Is this the right place?" they ask. Even the most ardent environmentalists, who object to killing a tree for Christ, appreciate that at my farm, trees grow back.

Customers see how a forest functions; when a tree falls, mysteriously a branch or sprout, rises above the detritus and makes its way to the sunlight. During the season I share the land with these harvesters. I explain that this tree farm functions as a renewable resource: essentially a branch is cut and a new one grows back. In this way, the forest and meadow is maintained. One price for any tree assures that only the tallest ones will be cut and the shorter left for next year's stock.

I hadn't anticipated that people would appreciate this farm in the same way I do each morning as I walk the fields. With clippers in hand, I lightly shape the trees, looking to see what happened during the night (something must be different), how unnoticeably they change. How they work out their own space, the branches meeting, diverging and accommodating each other while establishing structural integrity. Not wanting to alter the night's work, I step carefully to avoid breaking the strands of newly spun webs and trampling a poppy or weed that might have sprung up overnight. From this forest, I learn the value of my nurturing; I only trim shoots that grow in odd ways. Throughout the year I cohabit with my trees, noticing their whims, moods, falterings. In spring, they remain sprightly and erect while in the summer they drag and fade. When days shorten and the night temperature cools, the trees moisten and miraculously perk up. Douglas fir reach to the sky, Arizona Cypresses are like frosty-blue lace, and Incense Cedars look like green gossamer feathers. Non-traditional, these trees have become customers' favorites.



As I once again try to start a fire in the stove with wet wood, I ask myself why I never manage to have a dry supply for winter. The answer is I'd rather be out with the trees and refuse, perhaps, to notice that winter has come until it's cold and raining, and my fire won't light. It is when shoving in newspaper, pine needles, and anything that looks the least bit dry that I reflect on this year's harvesters, who come to chose their Christmas Tree.

An oasis of natural beauty, La Pajarosa Tree Farm is a contrast to the well manicured estates and vineyards surrounding it. The farm brings out the best in people, promoting a tender kinship. With no roads or signs, the natural landscape soothes tree seekers. Kids feel free to run from one tree to another, exclaiming "How about this one?" Until a few years ago I was not keen about dealing with masses of people flocking for trees. My then mother-in-law, my farming mentor, used to graciously welcome customers, admiring their children. Would I ever become such a gracious hostess? The turning point occurred when a friend pointed out, "People don't come to see you, they come to get a tree." Her advice changed my attitude and now twenty years later, greeting people is a pleasure. The place hosts itself. People unwind, visibly relax and I realize that I do a valuable community service.

The soft-spoken and gentle come here. Men pop out of their trucks, introduce themselves, and shake my hand. Women, respectful and polite, walk carefully through the fields, lost amidst cypresses, cedars, firs, and pines. They seek something different from the drastically shaved, Oregon trees, which look as though they'd been put through a dehydrating pencil sharpener. An observant harvester comments that these trees look unpruned which means that my artful, undiscernible shaping has created the right effect. As I gaze into the forest, the landscape is pastoral with graceful figures mingling and merging with the trees.

A little girl in a plum-plush velvet ruffled dress shyly shows off her dress and fancy white shoes while her father offers his hand, introduces himself. A boy wears a hat complete with horns; he hasn't taken it off since Halloween explains his father. One morning, a desperate woman appears at my door. "I need a tree," she announces. "Every second grader in my daughter's class already has one and she feels bereft." It's 8 A.M. and I stand at the threshold, naked under the coat I grabbed, with the door half cracked to conceal the chaos of my living room. Peer pressure in second grade, I wonder.

The perfect vs. the natural tree

My chance to educate people about a free-range natural forest comes in response to the demand for the *perfect tree*. Rarely is a natural tree perfect or a perfect tree natural. "The trees here are *natural*" I say with emphasis. Just like humans, trees also have character, shape, and quirks. Unlike those



featured in magazines, these have been nibbled by rabbits, have branches broken by passing deer, roots munched by gophers, and tops that aren't always straight. They are not cropped and bushy but instead branches reach out to sunlight, deflecting wind, and capturing water. I enhance the tree's open shape recognizing that conifers are perches for passing birds, homes to squirrels, insects, lichen, and moss. In contrast, the impenetrable mass of a perfectly sheared tree is like an elaborate bouffant hairdo in which a bird couldn't possibly get a foothold. However, definitions of perfect differ: a friend says that for him the perfect tree has a missing side.

To be a steward of this forest might be as valuable as anything I can do. I can't change the political administration that invades other countries and keeps people unhappy and starving, but I can grow trees, provide homes for wildlife and provide for those who appreciate the beauty of a pristine landscape. It is as noble a gesture as I can imagine. My efforts revolve around response, how do I respond to the landscape, not how it will respond to me. This relationship of receptivity and mutual nurturance is the nexus of true stewardship: listening to the land, to its heartbeat, and acting accordingly. At one time, like other farmers, I might have considered wildlife—gophers, deer, rabbits, coyotes—to be the bane of farming but have discovered over the years that with thousands of trees alive and well, losing a few to hungry wildlife is hardly worth noticing.

A friend's child wanders through the field, carrying a saw. We stop momentarily to watch a gopher peeking out of its hole while grazing around the perimeter. The brazen creature remains oblivious while the child is tempted to prod it with the saw. We stand looking foolish, while the gopher shamelessly eats. However, the child knows better than to attack. The next day, in the field lies a six-foot green Douglas fir, the first tree I'd ever seen toppled by a gopher. Green and healthy with a little knob of chewed roots, I right it and stick it back in the ground to see if somehow it will regenerate a new root structure. I wonder if my gophers are refugees from neighbors who annihilate them. Neighbors claim that horses step in the holes and break their legs. I wonder if prior to gopher elimination tactics horses all had broken legs.

Gradually, during all the years I've been in this valley, wildlife has been fenced out. Deer run along the road unable to penetrate miles of vineyard fencing. That is until they reach this place which is not only unfenced but also has an abundance of native flora, brush, and grasses. A great biological diversity is the healthiest state, according to ecologists, as nature is a vast complex of plants, insects, and animals. Instead of conventional mono cropping, I create a rich mosaic: trees are intercropped with a multitude of cuttings that root easily—geraniums and salvias—daffodils and *Watsonia*. Small tree seedlings are camouflaged and surrounded by lavender and herb cuttings that rabbits don't like. To show that wildlife has to eat too, I deliberately leave some dead dried trees in the field. Inevitably the bright



orange and red colors attract children whose parents have great difficulty talking them out of wanting a dead tree for their living room. "I like it," says Adam, who asks, "what's wrong with it?"

Stewarding is not about owning, which implies possessing an object that one can do with as one pleases. Possessing land in this way does not honor the integrity of a holistic system. Stewarding is the creation of mutual beneficence. It is not about scraping, contorting, and carving a landscape but rather about enhancing that which is already there: contouring in accordance with the lay of the land. Native peoples built pueblos or houses in the rocks in places such as Mesa Verde. They adapted to an existing environment, melding and shaping, which is different from clearing and starting from scratch. And so I plant trees while enhancing the naturescape. An unfenced wildlife friendly forest, the simple beauty of the tree field never ceases to enchant me. The land provides for me while I provide for it; I don't fight nature but honor its cycles and seasons as deer, rabbits, gophers, coyotes, and birds freely come and go.

With a bountiful crop harvested, and as December comes to an end, the remaining trees, and the new sprouts faithfully continue to grow.





FREEZING MOON

Mark Thalman

Through a windswept field, champagne powder blows.
I walk on sculptured dunes toward the vacant road
and pause to pick up a maple seed
still attached to its wing.

There are no maples for miles.
Maybe it was dropped by a sparrow flying home.

Using the heel of my boot as a hoe,
I scrape away a crust of ice
and plant this seed under a thin layer of soil,
so that come spring
a tree might break from the ground...

rising into the air out of which it fell,
and on another night such as this
will hold the moonlight
in the snow on its branches.





Solitary trees, if they grow at all, grow strong.
— *Winston Churchill*



FROM FATHER TO SON



Peter Rennebohm

I thought my father was nuts—that he'd lost all his marbles. As a fifteen year old in 1959, with what I thought to be a remarkably broad understanding of the world around me, I couldn't understand Dad wasting so much time and energy on such a pointless, fruitless endeavor.

He and my mother had purchased a cabin—well, a shack, really—in northern Minnesota, near the town of Hackensack. Situated deep in the woods, the property consisted of twenty acres of hardwood forest with a scattering of tall pines. The cabin sat on a slight hill set back from a small lake. A broad, overgrown meadow, once cleared for some sort of truck farm, sat alongside the gravel road fronting the property. This was the space that my father decided he wanted to fill with evergreens. He became a tree farmer.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources came in the second year of Dad's ownership and filled the meadow with one thousand Jack, Norway, and white pine trees. When they finished hand planting the seedlings, they presented him with a bright green, octagonal sign that he proudly displayed at the entrance to his property. The sign simply read, A MINNESOTA TREE FARM. I recall my father's huge smile as he tacked the sign on the gate and paused for a quick snapshot.

I do not remember once volunteering to help my dad with the trees—nor did he ever request any assistance from me, his only son. I think this was something he had to do himself. Dad was an alcoholic in the early stages of recovery, and his trees became his therapy, his twelve steps to a saner, healthier life. He needed those trees almost as if they were his own private AA group of supporters. They sustained him through the difficult period of rehabilitation and provided him an outlet that may have saved his life. The sum of those trees became Dad's Higher Power, the meadow his chapel.

From that day until he passed away in 1972, those trees were his babies. He spent countless hours walking the meadow, checking their progress, and toiling endlessly to, as he said, "relieve my trees." Armed with a broad-blade axe hooked at the tip, he labored to free his tiny seedlings from marauding poplar shoots, buckthorn, and the wild grape that attached to anything organic more than six inches tall.

Dad was an early riser, and once he'd filled his veins with caffeine and smoked a first cigar, he'd slip on his faded, torn coveralls, pick up his brush tool from the shed, and head for the meadow. I would watch him leave the cabin, shake my head, and shuffle off in the opposite direction—down to the lake to spend the morning fishing for bass and northern pike. I never understood his passion, never understood what possible enjoyment he attained from working so hard at a task that seemed so hopeless.



Years passed, and I moved on to other interests. Dad kept on working on behalf of his beloved trees. To my amazement, the seedlings thrived under his constant vigilance. What began as a thousand tiny, indiscernible sprigs in the tall, weed-choked grass eventually grew into a dark green forest of evergreens. By the time I graduated high school and went away to college, Dad's trees were ten and twelve feet tall—high enough to block the gravel road from view, thick enough to harbor grouse and deer, and admittedly a wonderfully pleasing addition to the property. He had succeeded in creating an environment for all the birds and animals in the neighborhood from what had been a useless, weed-choked field. He was very proud of his trees.

When he passed away some years later, we spread his ashes beneath the forest's protective boughs—I think he would have liked knowing that the meadow was his final resting place.

Twenty years later, long after my mother sold the cabin and joined dad, my wife and I purchased ten acres of land west of Minneapolis and built our home. Our two daughters had moved on, and I envisioned finishing out my years on property that was more country than city. The gentleman we bought the land from was ninety-six—he had homesteaded the land and cleared it for a raspberry farm. Surrounded on three sides by thick hardwoods, our home was built beneath a giant white oak. Six massive maples dotted the landscape near the house, beyond that immediate area, the fields and meadows were cropped for hay.

With no conscious thought on my part about tracing my father's path, I decided that I needed a tractor. For what purpose I wasn't sure at the time—I simply wanted to own a tractor. I bought an old Ford 9N with a live, three-point hitch, spent a thousand dollars to get it in tip-top shape, and spent the first winter repainting it. Once I had the tractor, to mollify my questioning spouse, I needed a purpose—something to do with that old machine. It came to me one cold, February day as I walked the dog: I would use the tractor to plant trees in a small nursery and later move them out to various areas around the property. I'd trench furrows and hand plant each one.

A friend told me about a program with the DNR where seedlings could be purchased for pennies. Once planted, in time they would fill empty space, add value to the land, and provide cover for resident deer, pheasants, fox and small rodents. I ordered fifteen hundred trees. They were delivered the following April.

They arrived tied in bundles of fifty, bare root and in immediate need of water and cover. I removed the twelve-inch sprigs and toed all into a shallow bank. In the course of a week, I mowed the tall grass on a hilltop near the house, dug trenches with a blade I had built to mount on the three point hitch, and planted my trees in what became a nursery. The tiny seedlings were spaced no more than a foot



apart, but my plan was to eventually move them out to various sites on the ten acres as they grew. In the nursery, I could easily weed, water, and tend each as they grew.

The following year I decided I needed more—I ordered another fifteen hundred of a similar mix of white pine, Norway pine, white spruce, maple and white oak. The DNR loaned me a tow-behind planter and, with the help of a young friend, I set out to plant the seedlings in the open meadows. Over the course of two days, after much trial and error, we'd planted all fifteen hundred in rows I would later discover were too close together.

As the years have passed, I've moved the nursery stock one by one to various sites around the property. The machine-planted trees disappeared in the tall grass and alfalfa. After a couple years of observing what appeared to be a total lack of growth from my young trees I finally understood—I finally realized exactly why my father had spent so much time clearing away noxious weeds and saplings from his trees. Without relieving the defenseless babies, they simply could not compete for water or nutrients or life-giving sunlight. For the next few years, I followed in my father's footsteps and spent hour after hour clearing killer vines and weeds from around each tree. I resurrected Dad's old brush tool and, along with a pair of long-handled loppers, I slowly worked my way around the property. My efforts became a labor of love.

About the fourth or fifth year, the small trees were finally visible. I could just see the tips as they fought to rise above the surrounding grasses. Row after row of young trees seemed to thrive with my efforts as they reached skyward. I began to feel rewarded—justified. The trees flourished with my constant care. I became, as had Dad, a steward of our small chunk of land. I began to gain an inkling of what my father must have felt with each passing year of diligent attention.

After twelve or thirteen years, my white pines and Norways were sixteen to twenty feet tall. Since I'd planted them too close together in their original bed, however, I was faced with a new dilemma: either cut many of them down to provide space for additional growth, or transplant as many trees as I could afford to other areas on the property.

Over the past two years, I have moved over two hundred large evergreens around the property. Free from competition with their neighbors, all should grow rapidly over the coming years. We moved another fifty to our children's homes and gave away additional trees to friends and neighbors looking to improve their landscape. Of the original three thousand, only fifty percent survived. I am told that is probably average. The spruces have lagged behind the others, and I can only guess that is a function of the heavy soil native to this area. The whites and Norways have grown twice as tall as the slow developing spruce.



Deer bed down beneath and among the pines. Pheasants nest adjacent to each copse. Black capped chickadees, cardinals, and juncos pluck seeds from the cones and nest within the protective cover of the thick boughs, and the reforested meadows provide needed windbreaks for many small critters.

A while back I opened up a journal my dad had kept and read the notations he'd made every time he scoured his plantation looking for offending weeds and suckers. He wrote of his efforts with an obvious sense of pride and fulfillment, and I think I finally understood exactly why it was so important to him. As I read his words it was as if a thick bank of fog suddenly parted and exposed a long tunnel to the blue sky beyond: I too needed my trees for my own recovery from alcoholism. Was this an ironic twist of fate or something more? I don't know—what I do know is that as with my father, my trees provided much needed relief from stress, tension and depression.

Dad's journal supplied me with a sense of what he'd experienced as he nurtured his trees. I could feel strength and power in his words from one season to the next. Perhaps if I had read his words as a younger man I might have saved myself years of pain and suffering. I'll never know.

Like my dad, however, I feel as if I have not only given something back to the land and created something useful and beneficial, but that I have been rewarded in a way I never could have imagined as a fourteen year old those many years ago.

There are many different paths to a healthy, spiritual life—to a recovery, a restoration of peace and contentment. Who among us will judge one to be better than another? Nature provides us with endless bounty—some of which we can touch, see, feel, or taste, and some that is nothing more than a personal replenishment, an awakening of the soul.

Dad finally figured it all out—he found his serenity, and I think I just might have found mine too.





FRUIT TREES *for Mary*



Cynthia Gallaher

Old man Peesel's cherry orchard
of the empty lot prairie,
reddened our fingers and lips,
until the shotgun glittered
from his garage window
across the alley.

We bolted past the pear tree
into a neighbor's yard,
three years waiting before
green fruit and no partridges.



But at the end of summer,
apples and wild plums
found their way to the streets
on their own,
a mad smash of pulp and
tangy fragrance,
our shoes to carry
a portion of their crushed sweetness
back to school.

Leaves turned rusty,
but thorn apples
still clung tightly to
park district trees,
branches we girls climbed
higher than boys on Thursdays,
thanks to acrobatics and ballet
on Wednesdays.



We plucked sour-smooth fruit,
cradled each in bent fingers
like a dart,
and aimed,
whipped,
right at boys' throats,
to take their breath away,
until we found
other methods.





Do not be afraid to go out on a limb...
That's where the fruit is.
—*Anonymous*



FULL MEASURE OF BLACK WALNUT

Imogene Bolls

Your thin leaflets lift light
unevenly. Fragile lattice of petioles
and alternates, lacy, fern-like,
each branch catches sun swatches
and shade in no pattern
discernible to a watching eye.

Surely you, too, see no reason
for one limb to be blessed more than another;
for clouds to cluster and sometimes
shadows fall across the sun too soon,
before each has had its turn;

for some of yours (trunk-hugging,
secretive, tender) never to have
their full measure—except as measure

means pulled over time
to the inner core and regiven,
translated over and over
into leaf, stem, leaf, stem....





GHAZAL-SONNET ON *TREE*

J. R. Solonche

In this world there are many ugly things.
However, there is no such thing as an ugly tree.

It is said our distant ancestors were animals like lemurs.
Perhaps that is why we feel homesick when we look up into a tree.

One of my favorite paintings is by Georgia O'Keeffe.
It is called *The Lawrence Tree*.

There are people too sensitive to enjoy watching a circus elephant.
Yet of these people, most will delight in a Christmas tree.

There are many trees that have wonderful names.
The best ones to say aloud are *sassafras* and *loblolly pine tree*.

Life is too profound a mystery for the sentient to comprehend.
Therefore, it is fitting wise for the oldest living thing to be a tree.

Solonche, at the moment before death, what would you choose to see?
At the moment before death, I would choose to see the flowering cherry tree.





Trees are happy for no reason; they are not going to become prime ministers or presidents and they are not going to become rich and they will never have any bank balance.

—*Osho*



GNOME

Frank Finale

That gnome of an apple tree
where green boys
dropped from crooked branches
while whooping, "GERONIMO!"
still lives. The once vacant lot
laced with lightning
bugs, asterisks of blue chicory,
chirruping crickets
and a throb of frogs, now grows
twelve-story apartments
that blink in the dark. Between the first
story and second,
the gnome breathes in traffic.
Every year
blooming from its dark niche, it tickles
its space pink
with flurries of petals over empty bottles,
Styrofoam cups
and piecemeal litter of lives. Still
bears fruit!





GRANDIFLORA

Scott McMorrow

Grand Dame
so many climbed
your sweet brown trunk

Whose water nourishes
silver scented leaf
while hunchback dusk creeps

Blue green triumph
over hands long dead
burning red orange
for spring growth

Splayed limbs reveal
ageless dreams
encrusted with inveterate desire

Ancient roots furrow grey soil
love's internment plucking
bud beauty youth

Do those who rubbed against
recall your wind willowy way





A tree is our most intimate contact with nature.
—*George Nakashima*



GRANDMOTHER MAPLE

Jeannette Cabanis-Brewin

Linear hieroglyphic of sapsucker holes,
messages from squirrels and bobcats
pine cones deconstructed
blackened spoor half-hidden
under ashy purple leafdamp.
A reader of signs could read the runes they make.

Ten years ago we galloped horses down
a trail now clogged with mystery.
Laurel fingers, gnarled and clever, pluck at my hat,
fling it backward ten feet.



I visit time to time, despite the difficulty;
today I look in just to see how
she's faring after another round:
her 400th but who's counting,
my 40th, days numbered like my bones.
She's flung down two branches thick as my body,
demolishing Kirwin's fenceline with grand disregard.
She arches her lichened breast before
a patch of southern sky smashed open.
Her topmost twigs are shaggy with moss but
where a spear is storm-driven into frozen ground,
the sound wood smells clean.
Her mossy skirts swirl amid
those parts of herself jettisoned.
She has cleared for herself a courtyard,
leaves weaving a wet carpet, wreaths
of frozen bracken golden as tribute.
She lifts her hoary sightless crown to a faded sun.



A twig snapped from her fallen limb
in my kitchen window will later swell
with damp-red leaves impossibly small,
translucent and fine-veined:
like the eyelids of a premature infant,
they barely unfurl.

But from the broken pieces bought home to burn,
ancient sunlight is uncasked. It remembers
how to drive back the dark.
I stretch my frozen fingers to her fire.





GROUNDING

Pit Menousek Pinegar

I've wanted to do it
for years—lie down
under the maple
in the back yard,

under leaves falling,
gold piling up
around me,
leaf after leaf

brushing my face
like butterfly wings.
Today was the day:
late October,

76 degrees,
the year, the season
towers and families,
as well as leaves,

came down. I must
feel this fall,
the full measure of things
ending, must imagine

I am ground-solid,
the world around me
a casualty of season,
and after a time,





we'll all rise—
I from ground, sap
in trees, families and
phoenix from ash.





The planting of a tree is the least self-centered
thing we can do.

—*Thornton Wilder*



HAIKU

Mitchell B. Rider (1921-1993)

I.

Lone Pine, your branches
giving sound to
summer wind...
Gay chickadee's home.



II.

Cold, leafless winter...
But look, a bright morning sun...
Sparrows chirping!





HARVEST

Gail Kadison Golden

The sign said: 'Pick your own apples',
and I, heavy with a child as yet unharvested,
came into the orchard, impelled, as if
the sign were a mandate.

The trees and I, clumsy with ripe fruit,
weary beneath a dying autumn sun,
knew each other, sang but one song—

sang, 'This is precious beyond all reckoning,
this moment before the harvest.

I seize it, breathe it, elongate the seconds,
this last moment in which I am
both the tree and the fruit.

I am all, all of it.
It is all of me.'

To let it go, to let it fall away from me,
becoming other, is like a dream,
as it is a dream in February,
to hold a winter apple,
and remember that it comes from trees.





Trees are food



HAVE A GOOD DAY...AND GOODBYE

William G. Ward

This, my friends,
my history,
some of it tragedy,
some of it comedy,
much of it like most,
perfunctory.

As a tree
I could live
most woodenly
or—please excuse me—
most sappily,
but instead I try to live
as humanly as possible,



You see, I can respond tearily
when the owl strikes the mouse,
and I can shake merrily
when the rain soaks the bees,
and I can respond sympathetically,
when a boy falls out of me,
compoundly,

And I can feel deepest remorse
when men burn down my family—
who'll oxygenate the world?
who'll provide the shade and shadows?
and over this rock raise the canopy of greenery?
who'll root the earth so fixedly?



who'll embrace the birds most fondly?
who'll kiss and caress the wind
most affectionately?
I ask you all this.

I as a tree, one of God's creatures,
inhabit this planet coequally,
I raise my soul to the heavens,
affix my being to this soil,
live out my allotted years productively,
sometimes even victoriously,
proud
determined
worthy
hopefully.





HEADING NORTH ON I-85

Jeremy Frey

He loves her like those pines
love that lake at the Welcome to South Carolina
rest area heading north on 1-85.
That grove of straight swaying pine
congregated here and now for important business:
to watch the lake, and notice how and where the sun
blanches off the top of her.

*"You are this lake
and I, these pines," he told her.
"I dip my roots deep beneath you
as we drink from the same source.
The wind making me sway is the same
wind making the ripples on the surface
of your skin."*

"I like that," she said.



Trees are Mysterious





HEARING

Jean Linville

branches creak and snap
rubbing out a rhythm of time
winter wind
weaving its way through
fainter and further
into the cold unbroken silence
above the sound of your breathing
a faint rustling
comes to your ear
head cocked, then turned
to see a lone, brown leaf
high, near the top of the tree
the wind has woven its way back
glad to have found
this one remaining chime
whose music is the song of
perseverance and remembrance





HEIR APPARENT

Ted Olson

Tired of my running
around his house all morning,
Father promised me
a dollar

if I'd go outside
and sit still
until I could see
his Arbor Day tree grow taller:

so I waited
in his yard
all afternoon
watching that sapling
stand

perfectly motionless:
then, at sunset,
the topmost leaf
seemed to wave.

Father
didn't give me
the dollar,
and I never
asked for it.





Man is nature as much as trees.
—*Dan Kiley*



HER WAY TO SOIL

Nancy Gustafson

She imagined herself enduring,
a seed protected within a tough shell
worthy to be womb and cradle,
smooth, round, brown, hard,
a buckeye in God's pocket.

But she drifted like a cottonwood seed,
a willy-nilly wind slave without
a milestone chart or destination,
her seedpod a white silk parachute.
Yet she found her way to soil.

One day a cocklebur in a big hurry
to catch a passing dog, pierced
her parachute. They spiraled down entwined,
and for a time both thrived, until
beneath her green leaves deep shade arrived
where grass can't grow for long,
and withers.

And she endured, sunk deep roots,
embraced the sky with spreading branches
and birthed a million seeds,
drifting white silk parachutes.
She had become all she imagined.





HOMESICKNESS

Cathryn Essinger

I think about the silence of a maple
in a backyard in Iowa, in a city
that I have not seen since childhood.

Surely, it is not very different
from the maple that I am looking at now.
Ohio light must fall in much the same manner,

the ruffled leaves sighing the way ladies do
in old movies with fluttering fans
spread across their ample bosoms,

affecting airs perhaps, but natural here.
And assuming all that the trees
have in common is the persistence

of the wind, should I accuse the maple
in Ohio of putting on airs, if it imitates
a tree in Iowa that it has never met?





If we represent knowledge as a tree, we know what things that are divided are yet connected. We know that to observe the divisions and ignore the connections is to destroy the tree.

—*Wendell Berry*



HOW SOON IS THE FIG TREE WITHERED AWAY! (Matthew 21:20)



Jan Epton Seale

This morning when my husband and I walked by the place where the hotel had stood, the ghosts of old whores whispered to us.

In the western sky a smattering of stars enclosed a waning moon. In the east, the sky was paling to blue with streaks of pink heralding a sun climbing up out of the Gulf to shine relentlessly all day on the Rio Grande Valley of Texas where we live, a stone's throw from Mexico. A host of pigeons rose from the tall palms facing the construction site and crossed over the gleaming fresh-poured cement to a row of old palms in the next block.

They could have lit in our fig tree, had it been there. What is there in its place, as far as I can tell from the times I have walked over there and stood watching the workmen, is a vent for a toilet.

Once the lot was the site of the hotel where relatives stayed when they came into town for a wedding or funeral. It sat on a whole prime city block surrounded by palm trees filled with parrots and pigeons and dates. Over the years the building dwindled to a fire-prone haunt for drug dealings and quick sex, a roach-infested flim flam of an edifice. Even the sentimental agreed that the structure had seen better days.

Three years ago, when the wrecking crew came and for days hauled away the old landmark building, the neighborhood was abuzz with possibilities for what might replace it. Some entertained the rumor that because there were still so many trees and shrubs, (and for whatever reason, the crew had been careful not to harm them) the block was going to be made into a city park. In fact, when the old walls came down, an entire tropical garden was disclosed in the private courtyard where the pool had been.

Among the giant schiffleras and tall ragged banana plants, the fragrant gardenias and frangi-pangi, stood an old-fashioned fig tree. It and the palm trees soon became the sole inhabitants of the block, the more fragile plants quickly dying without the protection of the old structure.

Fig trees have an honored and holy provenance. They flourish and wither throughout the Bible, the absence, ripeness or rottenness of their fruit assigned moral value. The prophet Jeremiah preached about bad figs, which he proclaimed "naughty," "vile," and "evil", and good figs, graded "first ripe" or "very good." Fig leaves, sewn together, provided the first antidote for shame with Adam and Eve.

Our fig tree was of good moral character, for it apparently had kept bearing year after year, despite not being pruned or fertilized, despite the Johnson grass that grew waist-high around it and the traffic fumes which drifted over it and the vandals who broke off its limbs and carved its trunk.



The day we discovered it had ripe fruit, we thrashed around on the lot until we located an old plastic bag and proceeded to fill it with Jeremianic “first ripe” figs.

After that, when we struck out in the pre-dawn, we took a bag to pick the day’s figs, before the grackles and wasps found the ones that had blushed in the night from their hard green selves to tender iridescent orbs. Miraculously—and this raised the ante on our luck—no other humans in the neighborhood seemed to care a fig about figs.

Sometimes, as we picked, the perfection of a certain fig overcame us and we would celebrate our luck and the goodness of the tree by showing it to the other. Then, we’d pop it into our mouth, coming down on the incredible sweetness made up of the hundreds of minute interior flowers that give the fruit its unique masticatory essence.

In June of the third year of our love affair with the fig tree, we came upon a tank truck backed into the lot watering a cluster of new palms that had been planted the day before. The older palms—the ones that had towered thirty feet in the air and had survived a number of hurricanes and were always filled with birds and had been used in foregrounds of pictures with spectacular sunsets in chamber of commerce brochures—had been trimmed and balled and prepared for relocation. For now, they lay about on the ground like mortal pharaohs without burial chambers.

Yet the fig tree still stood, and so we entertained hope against hope that it was not going to be taken. Maybe we should have made placards of protest right then. Should have paraded on the edge of the street with our signs when the commuters started by at dawn, as one lone ordinary working woman had done across town the day they took out a cluster of 80-year-old giant palms to make a parking lot for a discount shoe store. We didn’t care if we never ate another fig from the tree. We didn’t care if we couldn’t see it, or get to it anymore. We just wanted it to live. It deserved life. We had begun to count it a talisman, a small prayer, a stay against the entropy of progress.

And so we waited. Each morning as we rounded the corner, we grew silent, strained to see it...and there it was. We convinced ourselves it was being incorporated into the new plans.

Another July came and we waded into the tall grass to check daily the ripening of another season’s figs. We picked only the ripe ones and hauled them home, eating a few for breakfast, saving the rest until we had enough to cook with a little lemon peel and sugar and put in clean mayonnaise jars for the freezer.

After a few days, two ominous signs appeared on the lot. One, a literal sign in the form of a portable drag-in read:

COMING SOON TO THIS LOCATION
BUSINESS PLAZA
OFFICE SPACE AVAILABLE



The other sign was a bulldozer-wide strip of soil scraped of careless weeds and Johnson grass running the length of the lot.

Here was evidence of change. Yet nothing else happened. We held our breath and picked figs.

One morning, coming up the driveway with the day's figs in tow, we heard the phone ringing insistently. It was my 82-year-old mother upstate, who had been in bed a few days recovering from a mysterious fall. Now she sounded shaken and frightened. The EMS people had just taken Dad to the hospital. My sister, living in the same town, had been called away the day before. I showered and caught a plane.

The fig tree did not cross my mind until many mornings later. By now, my father had come home from the hospital, his heart settled down for a while longer. My mother had begun slowly walking about the house with a cane—the original fall had either actually been or portended a slight stroke. I was getting anxious to go south again. I knew my desk would be piled high with mail, the garden overgrown, the birds thirsty.

We sat at the table that morning having breakfast, one of the few times we'd managed a quorum for a meal. Suddenly Mother stopped her laborious chewing. "It's August," she said. "My fig tree. I nearly forgot."

She rose and went to the kitchen window. "It's ready." She bent to the cabinet, got a pan and started for the back door. Dad and I had to quit our cereal and go with her to keep her steady.

From that day forth, Mother rose to supervise the harvest of the day's figs. We carried a chair out to the fig tree for her in the early morning light. Then we helped her, with her long robe and stumbling houseshoes and teetery walker, to get to it. There she instructed us as to ripe or unripe, big enough or not, until we had picked the dozen or so fruits that constituted that day's take.

Meanwhile, foil pans had to be tied to the branches to scare away the birds. Dad insisted on going up and down a stepladder to tie them strategically though when he came down he was pale and his hands trembled. He vowed that was enough of *that*, though it was obvious he was pleased to be pleasing his wife.

There was a great deal of protocol, as there always is in our mother's kitchen, to preparing the figs. First we had to peel them—a tedious enough activity to make one want to scream—because Mother had evolved a theory that their skins might be tough. A big kettle with a touch of water, a careful cutting of the fruit into halves or quarters, some lemon peel and sugar. Then bringing all to a gentle boil stirring, stirring, stirring. The figs were a big bother and I was so tired most mornings I took their preparation as a personal insult.



My sister is peculiarly not gifted in the very things she hates to do, and, back in town, she declared herself not a gifted canner of figs. But even *she* ended up canning a quart of the rosy knobs one day when I was off on R&R.

We both knew that the figs meant a great deal to our mother and so we humored her. They were one means by which she was regaining her will to live, for she is a woman who lives to eat. She not only delighted in the taste of figs but claimed all sorts of miraculous healing properties for them.

But what about my figs at home? By that time I didn't care if I ever ate another fig. Still...still there was the tree. The tree had survived, cheerfully, had waited for us each summer. We were downright fond of the tree. It too was a thing to get up for on a sweltering Texas summer morning. I lay on my cot in my father's study and wondered about *my* fig tree. A mother's and daughter's love for their respective fig trees were not lost on me; I smiled in the dark.

On the phone my husband hedged. "You can see for yourself when you get home."

I was dead weight in the car coming home from the airport. The struggle had lasted several weeks. I had left my parents better, never well again, but propped up for now, making do with the years that had suddenly hurled themselves against their genteel old age. Picking a few figs every morning. "Putting them up." Strong genetic signals out of their agrarian pasts. The figs were huge, testimony to the care the tree received the rest of the year. Denial that there would ever come a summer when no one would be there to cherish them.

I guess I knew that our fig tree was gone before I saw the big empty hole of sky. When we rounded the corner, there was nothing, nothing on the huge lot except the tenuous new palm cluster, some concrete foundation forms and iron reinforcements, and the flashing portable sign advertising office space.

"Forgive me, tree, I take you for good use," intones the *herbera* before harvesting a medicinal plant. The same could not be spoken of our fig tree, lying somewhere ignominiously with a hundred other trees uprooted that day. Nor to the others like it being sacrificed daily here on the Texas-Mexico border as the North American Free Trade Agreement literally paves over the open fields, the orchards, the old neighborhoods, gouging out everything that was planted with care and love, that has sunk its roots in the rich alluvial soil over the decades, that has survived desert drought and hurricane winds and river flooding.



It is not the same: developers sod in little strips of St. Augustine along the curb, establish a few blooming ornamentals around the order stations of fast-food installations, substitute three small nursery palms on a parking lot to replace a clump of eighty-year-old giants that served as home for a number of animals.

It's not the same: furnishing every tract house with a cute little three-foot junior oak, hoping the occupants of the new development will water it.

"The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field are withered; because joy is withered away..." (*Joel 1:12*)

Still, there's its cousin, my mother's fig tree a few hundred miles north. Putting out—gratis and juicy—cheering life on in my tired old mother and father where joy is not quite withered away. Testimony of what it meant to be the deep, eternal connections between plants and animals. Is it too late to honor the spirit of the generous and magical plant world? Will we be happy only when the last office building supplants the last fig tree? Don't we see the connection between a tree and joy?

"Now learn a parable of the fig tree." (*Mark 13:28*)





I WITNESS THE TREES DANCING

Mary Kate Azcu

Here the buttonwoods, oaks, and maples are different:
waving dressed fingertips, then rustling more intensely,
shaking limbs and leaves, entirely, yet all are firmly rooted.

As gray moves toward blue, branches turn their hands skyward.
The frenzied art escalates, challenges the air, pulling and tugging—
tempting their thirst.

The sun returns; the offering is gone; the dancing slows.
Now, waves of air, a barrage, moves over them
once again.





It's one thing not to see the forest for the trees, but then to go on to deny the reality of the forest is a more serious matter.

—*Paul Weiss*



IF YOU WOULD BE A POET

Timothy Walsh

Go often among trees.
Stand under them and understand
how trees reach higher toward the light
only by rooting deeper downward into dark.
Study the mad logic of their branching,
the necessary shapes of their leaves,
their thick bark, and simple needs.

Most of all, observe how forest trees
can turn a poor soil rich—
how they let fall their green canopies,
standing stark against the sky
while the thick leaf litter around them
 crumbles and decays.
See how each year the leaf-mould grows deeper
 and richer
how the lush growth of summer must wither
 on the ground
to fuel what will come.

See how even on barren rock faces
trees can rise
because they make their own soil
as they grow.





IN ITS LEAN PRIME

Natalie Safir

After a night of pounding thunderclaps
a blitz of bolts
from rocky peaks,
I opened my door to find

a tall aspen
uprooted in its lean prime
floating the length
of the blue pool

I, in my fifties,
sadly noting the fallen tree,
enjoyed the fine line it cut
across water,
how it sectioned the blue
with its spangled limbs

Across the courtyard
a young man discovering
the stricken tree
inert upon the pool cried out—

splitting the morning air
his scream
reached me like fire





A tree growing out of the ground is as wonderful today as it ever was.
It does not need to adopt new and startling methods.
—*Robert Henri*



IN THIS MOMENT

Holly Zeeb

Still a willow,
my aged mother
looks up to a canopy
of oak and birch, names
she's lost.

"These trees are a blessing."
She doesn't remember
her birthplace,
where she's lived,
those she has loved.

"These trees are a blessing,"
she repeats, knowing only
shape-color of leaf,
dapple of light and shade,
wind-rustle, bird-hover.

These trees are a blessing.





IT TAKES SO LONG TO NOTICE

Cynthia West

Piñons, you were here all along, taken for granted.
I didn't realize how much you gave me, clothing the hills with green.

Resting in your summer shade, feeling your rough bark, I watched lines of ants
crawl to the sweetness of your blood.

In fall I shook your cones onto a sheet. How good the house
smelled with roasting nuts.

Because so many of you grew on the land
you were not special.

On winter solstice our family offered prayers, asked for your life,
chopped you down to be our Christmas tree.



You were always here while I raised my kids, greeted all
who came to the door, served feasts with drunken laughter,

spread paint on canvas to speak the words I couldn't find.
Sun showed my hands slowly wrinkling.

You stood as usual when my children moved from home,
when they returned with their own young.

It takes so long to notice.

Now I have only your stark trunks sucked dry by thirsty beetles.
I couldn't believe my eyes when drought drained



your needles, when rust gnawed
your branches, one after another until most were tinder.

Silent the hills, littered with your skeletons.

Now I have only the trees I remember,
how it was when we were together.

How old I feel to have out-lived you





In the woods we return to reason and faith.
—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*



JACK PINE

Brent Christianson

As strong as his name,
bursting through granite, he flexes
and grows and shows his face
to the ravages of summer sun, lightning,
and blizzard. His green clusters
are fists, formed to challenge
and impress. Jack, *bonne chance!*

NORWAY PINE

Each bundle of needles is
an eye ceaselessly peering
in interest on the passing days.
Red bark neck reaches up
from shouldered granite shore to
keep you high and watchful.

WHITE PINE

You are, indeed, a princess.
Your bearing, straight, your
colors, subtle and perfect, your
wispy hair always in place.
You must be royal, beautiful
tree-woman, for nature herself
waits on you and keeps you
lovely.





JOURNEY TO THE DAWN REDWOOD
for Xue Ji Ru
died July 1999

Bernice Rendrick

The seed of the redwood that turns bronze
in autumn, nearly extinct,
was rescued from a forest in China.
Xue Ji Ru led a 1940's expedition,
braving bandits, hacking trails
through the back country
to replenish the earth
with this tree of rare light and color.



His face in the newspaper
is that of a tree monk,
thin, lined and with a gentle smile.

In California the seeds became trees.
When I journey to visit a dawn redwood
in Boulder Creek with a mend, it stands
with drooping apricot limbs
among the soft and deep greens
of neighboring firs, pines, cedars.
The pale orange fronds
are nearly bare in December,
the ground damp from recent rain,
a thick carpet of seeds and cones under the tree.

As we snap a photograph a woman comes
from the house, tells us it is a messy tree
but says it fondly and we know she waits
each year for the tree's soft spring growth.



Our journey was short, his was long
and dangerous. I think of what dedication
he must have had to know the world
that loses one family of trees
that glow in autumn with pastel light
are worth the months of stumbling
over rugged terrain, risking
his own life so others may know this tree,
almost gone from us, as he is now no more.





There are rich counsels in the trees.
—*Herbert P. Horne*



JULY

Ann Quid

Dangling my legs in a silvery stream
I pluck a leaf from a giving tree
and place it on top of my hair, just there
where sunlight gleams and wends its way
through tendrils curved past cheek and shoulder
bare of wintry cloths.

With motion spare, my thoughts and limbs
align my soul with wider dreams
and tend envisioned fields
alive with joy and sapient whims.

And leaning back against the tree,
I gather twigs and sweet debris from seasons past
and form a mellow mound. Slender stems from newer days
surround this place where crickets gaze
as I pluck the leaf from atop my hair
and lay it on the ground, just there
where summer wears its crown.





KILLING CHRISTMAS TREES WITH DAD

David Feela

My father led me into the hills one Sunday in December more than 35 years ago. I carried the saw; he carried the axe. We trudged through the snow, hunting the wild Christmas tree.

He checked each tree for fullness and height, trying to picture it standing in our living room beside the couch. I checked the bottom, worried that the stacks of Christmas presents I imagined might not fit underneath.

When we made our selection, my father cut. I shouted “timber” as the tree fell, then ran around its fallen corpse singing “Ding-Dong the Witch is Dead” instead of an inspirational chorus of “Oh Christmas Tree.” My father told me to shut up.

After dragging the tree to our car and tying it to the roof rack, I noticed for the first time my sticky hands. My father said it was just tree sap. I looked at my hands in horror; I glanced at the stump of the tree’s trunk where a bead of amber glistened in the sunlight: It was tree blood!

When we got home I went to my room, unwilling to touch that tree again, and much to my father’s dismay—I refused to decorate it. I stayed clear of our tree all during the holidays, only creeping up on it Christmas morning to snatch my presents away.

I hadn’t, for some reason, seen a Christmas tree as a living thing until, with my father’s help, I managed to cut one down. That fatal Christmas I vowed never to kill another tree for mere decoration. I have cut dead standing trees for firewood and gone to the lumber yard to purchase boards. I have rubbed lemon Pledge on my dining room table and sliced vegetables on a cutting board. But never, never, never have I ever again cut a living tree off the face of this planet for a month of tinsel and lights.

By New Year’s Day, the Christmas tree had exhausted its usefulness. The needles came loose at the slightest touch; they turned brown and dropped to the floor in a futile attempt at fertilizing the carpet. Trees are like that: they never stop trying to do their ecological best to help the planet.

My father dragged the tree out the back door, wrapped in a shroud—or so it seemed—all the joy it had once embodied for him was somehow drained from it. Drained from us.

My father tried half-heartedly to revive the tradition of Christmas trees in our house, but the damage was done. There was no way to bring it back to life. Then one year, he came home with a large cardboard box. Inside was our first artificial tree. Granted, it was an ugly thing, so unlike a real tree that I wondered if the people who manufactured it in China had trees of their own to use as models.

We kept that tree, though, and every year when we pulled it out of the attic I remembered our expedition to the woods, a place that has become sacred for me, where those beautiful, living, sentient



beings called trees are celebrating every day the rebirth of our planet.

I don't mean to sound like Scrooge, trashing a tradition simply for the sake of complaining, but wouldn't giving one little gift to the earth be a nice thing to do for Christmas? One little gift from the people who abuse her the most? And I don't mean planting a tree to make up for the one you're taking, though by all means plant one. No, I mean instead of planting a tree leave one to grow. No house is better for having a dying tree standing in it. This is a tradition we can do without.





You ever notice that trees do everything to git attention we do,
except walk?
—*Alice Walker*



KINSHIP

John E. Smelcer

Last night, I dreamed
against the trunk of a great tree
full of ravens. In the vision,
I joined them fighting for the flesh
of spawned salmon and
flying high above our small village
sprawled along the braided river's edge.
In the revealing light of dawn, I awoke
naked and curled beneath the leafless tree,
a dozen black birds around me,
their patient eyes unflinching.

The closest cocked his beaked head and cawed,
Speak, Brother Raven. Speak.

But I only shooed him away,
no longer comprehending his ancient words.





LEARNING MY NAME

Gloria Vando

We have a dialogue, this tree and I,
back to my first lonely run across
the morning, light pursuing me
like a bandit threatening anonymity.
I point it out, now, to my husband,
Look! There it is—my tree.
But on that dawn, jogging up the hill,
my heart feuding with itself,
blood goosestepping in my temples,
my chest, I thought I'd die,
before I'd reach the top—still,
up I went, up the slick slope
to the plateau, where I collapsed
at the foot of the giant pin oak
and lay there in the green lull till
breath came easy, lay there
a good hour inhaling the dark fumes
of mould and peat moss and
regenerating worms. When I sat up
and looked around me, I was landlocked,
beached. I, who'd grown up defying
the surge and undertow of seas
and oceans—earthbound! Yet
I had come to cherish this land,
its contours comforting as dawn,
reassuring as my grandmother's arms
had been, ready always to bear my pain.
In the distance I could see a fox
strutting across the meadow, above me





sparrows weaving their nest, above
them a hawk on the lookout for game—
Oh, I was happy—I guess.
I leaned back against the tree,
patted the jagged bark behind me
in a reverse embrace and heard—
I swear!—clear as a whisper of love—
I heard my name.





Someone's sitting in the shade today because
someone planted a tree a long time ago.

— *Warren Buffett*



LEARNING TREES

Adrian S. Potter

The weather sweats like mid-July, but it is actually late autumn
A fact verified by tumbling leaves dressed in coats of auburn and maize
And further confirmed by the imminent downfall of daylight's empire
Despite the reclamation of that missing hour we once loaned to spring
Within weeks, these old birch trees will pose nude, without shame
Completely naked except for thin curtains of decorative frost
Winter trees will witness shadows conquering daytime
Stoic while withstanding the chill and gloom
Impersonating death for a few months, maybe more
Until, by design, a rebirth will naturally take place
They will regenerate with new foliage, fresh life
Possessing decades of experience, the trees act as clever tutors
Humbly showing humans that when your shell collapses, you can rise again
In spite of the cold, the darkness, and the unknown.





LESSONS FROM THE URBAN WOODS

Sharon Griffiths

We were waiting the day
it was dumped on the sidewalk.
Skinny, wrapped in a burlap diaper,
bound the full length of its trunk.
Mary said we'd have to cut that bandage off,
so it wouldn't suffocate.

They stuffed it in a two-foot square
between our houses, left it shivering
in a cloud of exhaust, propped
by two splintered poles
and a twist of metal like a collar.



I thought we'd get an elm or something
that would stand a better chance.
To help it, we broke nails tearing bricks
from the pit, raking with our fingers.
We had no worms to turn the dirt, so we used
the roots of sweet allysum—
and my unaccustomed hands
began to look like Mary's—for a while.

We carried many buckets that first summer,
water sloshing down our stoops,
until the roots were long enough
to reach the spring that crosses 49th Street.
It carries off soil every summer, and when
the street splits opens like an empty fist,
cars lose their hubcaps all night long.



To Mary, the tree was a cherished proxy
for the peach she had grown from a pit,
and with sheer Hell's Kitchen persistence,
willed it to make flowers and the sweetest fruit
I ever tasted. Then she watched it die, drowned
in spite, in the second-hand light
of an old-law courtyard.

It was to be my symbol of survival in chaos
(I was trying to be so tough at the time).
A daily lesson in urban strength,
the grace that comes from elemental living.
I showed all my friends, pointing with pride
down the block to the others.
Ours got less light and was twice as big.

I hate the big, busy buildings
now standing across the street,
crowding out the precious light.
But Mary still sweeps around the pit.
She moves more slowly now.

I make sure to touch that tree whenever I'm there—
even if it means crossing the street in the rain.
A self-conscious salutation—just long enough
to feel that tough and fragile life
and give back some of the grace and strength
I've found in the meantime.





Trees are the earth's endless effort to speak to the listening heaven.
—*Rabindranath Tagore*



LIQUID AMBAR

Ellen Hart

This morning a mound of gold
carpets my deck. The liquid
ambar sheds daily, leaf by leaf
gently floating, or whipped by
storms, creates this bounty
laid before me.

My birdfeeder is a hub of activity.
Mourning doves by the dozen
vie for position on the narrow disc
their chubby bodies swinging from
the creaking limb.



Others wait patiently
on the roof and all warble
away in a flurry when I step
through the door; return when
they recognize the caretaker
of their sanctuary.

I slip into the hot tub
with a mug of coffee, a novel
that eludes because I'm brimming
with birthday blues;
an annual reckoning,
losses weigh heavier again.



A golden leaf swirls past
as I regard my giving tree.
Soon it will be ice glazed
and I will have diamonds followed
by spring's lace, the velvet of summer.

Then I realize that all of
the straw has been spun into
gold and I only had to notice.
I am Queen Midas soaking
in the middle of my kingdom.





LOST SHADOWS

J. Glenn Evans

A favored river walk in the deep woods;
Temples of God I often called these trees.
To build such a place—only God could.
Refuge for God's creatures that are still free.
In the spring—in the summer—streams of light
Pierce through windows of the tall tree branches.
Rays of gold and silver from heaven's height,
God's fingers that point to man's last chances.
Then one summer I took this hallowed walk;
Parched grass dead moss and only insects played.
Overhead flew a circling hawk
Where once a sacred ancient forest lay.

The giants of old were not to be found,
Only their shoes were left upon the ground.





The groves were God's first temples.
—*William Cullen Bryant*



LOVE, LIKE A TREE

Ellen Kitzes Delfiner

Love, like a tree you were
Your roots planted solidly in the earth
From them grew the tower
That became your strength, and mine

Fires raged,
Storms washed over you,
You endured
Your rock hard limbs
Embraced me,
Sheltered me,
Fed me
Your leaves,
Your fruit

I played in your branches
You taught me wisdom,
Sent me to forage in fields far away,
To stand like a tree
Among all others

And still I lean
Against your toughened bark
Bent, sodden
Washed through with autumn rains
I wrap my arms around you
Your withered branches snap and fall





LUCY IN THE SKY

Gabriel Constans



The first gale of the season cut through her knotted muscles like a pickaxe breaking a block of ice. The howling wind attacked her defenseless anatomy with piercing needles of rain. There was no mercy. The storm numbed her senses with eighty to ninety kilometer-an-hour gusts of furry, blowing her limber, toughened body two to three feet off the limb with each shot. If she hadn't been watching the other branches submit to the storm's passions and allowed her tiny forty-five kilogram figure to follow suit, she would have met a quick and lonely death. It was a sobering fall from her precarious perch in the redwoods to the solid mass below.

Lucy had allowed the ancient trees to keep her captive for six months. She saw no future in returning to earth's sorry surface. Her short, twenty-six year old blond hair had turned white with constant exposure to the elements and the creases around her moss green eyes were etched deeply in her facial canvas. Her muscles felt like wet leather rope when she moved, slow as a koala, in the top third of the tree's orbit. The numerous blisters on her hands and feet were covered with hardened calluses. The boils and scrapes on her face, neck and arms had left tiny blotches of fresh white skin where the scabs had completed their cycle and fallen with the trees flesh of decaying moss and bark.

She had first ascended the red giant in October, planning to stay for a few days, to protest government plans to cut down sections of her beloved, old growth forest. When news of her action first hit the press she was barraged with admiration and contempt. Environmentalists thronged to her cause. Loggers and local mill-workers discounted her as a kook. Some came to hurl insults, rocks and threats, but the distance and height gave her a cushion of immunity from both praise and defilement.

After the first weeks roar boiled down to a simmer and the journalists, ecologists and loggers went to fight other battles, Lucy remained embedded aloft in her swaying nest in the sky.

Her good friend, Jenny, faithfully brought her essentials, including news and correspondence. She bundled it all tightly in a large, green duffel bag, after replacing the empty containers Lucy let down by rope. She passed on the latest rumors from Congress and their various promises to limit or sell only "selective" acres for logging.

As the days began to shorten and weeks became months, Jenny pleaded with Lucy to reconsider her mission. "You've made your point." She wrote. "Call it off. We need your help down here."

Jenny didn't mind the two-mile trek carrying in supplies week after week or the long absence of her roommate. What had her worried and kept her awake at night, were lingering images of Lucy's face turning blue like frozen ice or finding her body splattered on the ground after a bone-breaking fall. She feared for her friend's life, unable to understand that Lucy had never felt so alive.



Lucy tried to tell Jenny about her life in nature's scaffolding, but her explanations sounded like a mishmash of New Age salad. Sure, she had her moments of doubt, of suffocating loneliness and fear; waking to a tickling swarm of soldier ants creeping in and around her pants, trying to find their way to her measly stock of food. And nights... nights could be inconsolable. It was like having your eyes covered with a blindfold, being placed in a dark velvet bag with no opening and catapulted into a black hole at the farthest comers of the galaxy. At times she questioned her very existence, let alone her sanity. Yet, it was that same sense of nothingness, of having no self, no container, no limits or boundaries; that filled her with an energy and excitement beyond her conscious understanding. Every sunrise was another birth from darkness, an affirmation of creation and light.

By the time March had sprouted, Jenny informed Lucy that she had outlasted one of the wettest winters ever recorded. Her reward for surviving this record setting onslaught was witnessing a cornucopia of life invade the forest. Blue jays and ravens squawked with alarm and complaint. Elk bellowed with desire and challenge. Large gray squirrels appeared and disappeared with looks of astonished amusement. "What's she doing up here?" They seemed to turn and question. "Maybe she's lost." One would squeak. "Yeah," the other replied. "She's *definitely* not from this neighborhood." They appeared to shake their heads in disgust, puff up their bushy tails and indignantly make a boisterous exit, leaving Lucy in stitches.

Lucy's ex-husband, Derrick, had wanted "lots of kids", even though she had insisted that it wasn't in her genes. She felt that bringing another child into the world was nothing but "selfish and cruel." There were far too many people crowding the planet already and half of those living, if you could call it that, were in poverty or dying of disease and hunger.

Lucy watched some ever-alert does walking gracefully below; their frisky fawns following close behind. Up above, adult robins and jays fed their frenzied young, who pushed and shoved for the best seat in their parents' private cafe.

"What's it like to make a life?" She wondered. "To carry a child, give birth and watch them grow?" She gripped the branches firmly with her partially gloved fingers, wrapped her strong legs around a sturdy limb, closed her eyes and felt its hardness against her stomach and thighs. "What do you think old friend?" she asked the ancients. "Did I make the right choice?"

She had started talking to herself that first night, the night she had climbed toward the clouds to find her spot, her center, her balance between heaven and earth. Redwoods were great listeners. They had been practicing the art for a few millennia. She had never met a creature of the human species that



could equal the complete, non-judgmental, silent attention she received from her forest friends. Trees never lied. They didn't leave you for someone prettier, younger or smarter. They didn't leave you for someone who wanted kids. Trees know their place. They know who and where they are. They don't get lost like Lucy's fraternal twin Sam.

Sam was the brother she'd picked on, fought with, loved and adored. They often knew what the other would say before they had opened their mouths. "Sam the man," Lucy boasted to the cool, crisp air.

"He was the best." She thought fondly. "Was," being the operative word. Now he lived among the walking dead. Cocaine and speed were his newly adopted siblings. They were all he wanted, needed or cared about, if you could say he cared at all. All of Lucy's sisterly attempts at rescue were declined or denied.

To top it all off Sam had ripped off his own family. He'd come to Thanksgiving dinner high on crank, stayed until they'd all gone to sleep, then stole away in the middle of the night with two-hundred dollars of their Mother's money, some jewelry and her portable stereo.

Lucy opened her eyes and watched a brown spider crawl over her arm. Its legs carried it quickly away from the strange fleshy bark clinging to the tree. Jays shouted a warning of approaching life. She heard singing, then footsteps snapping some fallen twigs. As the melodic voice approached and the birds silenced themselves for protection, she recognized Jenny's bouncy blond hair.

Jenny reached the small clearing at the foot of the tree, took the pack off her shoulders and leaned it against the trunk. She looked up and waved. Lucy waved back.

"You got a let..." Jenny yelled.

"What?" Lucy hollered back.

"You got a le..."

Lucy could barely hear her muffled reply. Jenny motioned for her to let down the rope. Lucy unhitched her lifeline from an adjoining branch and lowered an end. She watched Jenny tie it to the pack, give her a sign of completion and blew her a kiss. Lucy blew one back and lifted the bag.

Jenny sat down, with her back against big red and started singing. "We shall overcome. We shall overcome. Deep in my heart..."

Lucy grunted with relief as she gave one last pull and hoisted the faded, fraying bag onto the limb. She reached inside the outer pocket, eager for news. To her pleasant surprise, she discovered familiar stationary addressed to her Portland address. It was from her Mom. She hadn't told her family about the climb. She didn't want to "worry them," she'd reasoned.



Her first reaction was panic. "Something's happened to Dad!" she prophesied. "Maybe it's Grandma or Aunt Sharon!"

Brushing away the dirty bangs, which now covered her eyes, she apprehensively unfolded the tiny piece of processed wood and read her mother's words.

"Hi Honey. Hope you're well. We all missed you over the holidays. No guilt intended, just a fact. Daddy and I know how important your work is."

Lucy relaxed. "Sounds like they're OK." She thought. "Nothing out of the ordinary."

"We've had an early Boston spring." Her mother explained. "Your father finished his last project at work and we plan on taking a couple weeks vacation down south before the humidity sets in. You know how awful it can get.

"I know. I know. Enough about the weather, right? Here's the real news. Sam's back. And I mean really back. He's not using drugs anymore."

"What's new?" Lucy said to the leaves, her disappointment rising. "Same old scam."

"It's not like before." Her mother continued. "He's actually in a program this time. He's making amends. He even apologized for that Thanksgiving year before last, remember?"

Lucy read the last sentence three times before moving on. Sam had never apologized for anything his entire life!

"I'm not being Pollyanna or anything." Mom explained. "Your Dad and I went to some classes at the center and learned about co-dependency and relapse and how to not 'enable' Sam's condition."

"Parents." Lucy wondered. "Do they ever listen?" She had urged them to go to Al-Anon a zillion times, but they always thought they could work it out themselves, without 'outsiders'.

"He says his biggest regret is not seeing you." Her Mom wrote. "He feels sick over having pushed you away. He misses you more than anything." A growing lump of hope stuck in Lucy's throat. "You should be getting a letter from him any day." The lump broke free, rising to eye level.

The note concluded. "I know it's not good to get ahead of yourself on these things, but maybe we can all have Thanksgiving together this year like we used to when you and Sam were little." Tears of bittersweet longing poured from Lucy's eyes. "Well, not much else to say. We're awfully proud of you. Give our best to Jenny. Love Mom."

Jenny finished singing, turned her fanny pack around as she stood and looked up to wave goodbye to Lucy.

"Where is that girl?" she wondered out loud, as she shielded her eyes from the glare and strained to see her companion through the branches.



"Right here." A voice answered. She followed the sound's trail and saw Lucy descending, pack in tow, about five feet above her head.

"I'll be damned!" exclaimed Jenny.

"Nobody's damned," replied Lucy, as she dropped the pack and jumped to the ground. "Least of all you."

Jenny grabbed her by the shoulders as Lucy's weathered body swayed, leaned to the left and faltered. Jenny caught her halfway. They laughed, cried, hugged and wailed. Lucy, like Lazarus, seemed to have risen from the dead.

As Lucy began stretching her triathlon legs, which had kept her aloft for over six months, Jenny asked expectantly, "Who do you want to call first, the national office or the press?"

"Neither." Lucy grinned, as they walked arm and arm down the woman-made trail. A luxurious warmth spread through her chest with ever-increasing gratitude and joy. "I just heard about another guy who returned from the wilderness." she offered. "I think I'll give him a call and welcome him home."





Only when the last tree has died and the last river has been poisoned and last fish has been caught will we realize that we cannot eat money.

—*19th century Cree Indian saying*



MA COOK'S WILLOW



Laura Hartman

The sticky summers of my 1950's youth seem more extreme than those of today. Back then we did not have central air-conditioning in homes, cars or even most businesses. Lazy ceiling fans circulated stagnant waves of heat throughout the corner drug store, the butcher shop downtown, and the five and dime, causing men to roll up their sweat soaked shirt sleeves and ladies to mop their red faces with daintily embroidered handkerchiefs as they brushed back stray strands of limp, damp hair.

I accepted the heat as something that was inevitable, therefore, to be ignored if at all possible. In my eight year-old mind, the advantages to summer far out weighed the disadvantages.

Mom would blow up the double pink plastic rings of my Woolworth's swimming pool early in the morning, as diamonds of dew danced down the blades of grass. Uncoiling the green snaking garden hose, she created a crystal clear lagoon in which I would languish for hours in the heat of the afternoon sun, reading the latest Nancy Drew mystery.

Once—or if I were extremely lucky, twice—during the hottest part of the summer, we would make our annual trek six hours south to visit my great grandmother. The ritual always started the same.

During dinner, which always included beef or pork, as chicken was saved for Sunday dinner, potatoes, two kinds of vegetables—one always some kind of beans—and thick slices of bread slathered with butter, dad would turn to mom and tell her he had talked to Grandma on the telephone. Our black telephone hung on the dining room wall.

Dad didn't talk on the phone much in those days. Grandpa and Grandma lived a mile or so away, and we saw them every Sunday afternoon without fail. So, for Dad to talk to his mother on the phone during the week in the summer could only mean one thing; we were going to Ma Cook's house in Southern Illinois.

Mom and Dad discussed our travel plans at the dinner table while sipping sweet tea. Not the bitter tea from up north where we lived an hour outside of Chicago, but the tea of my father's youth down south. Often scornfully compared to Kool-Aid by our northern neighbors, sweet tea was a mainstay of our hot summer nights. I was even allowed to drink one small glass, poured from the nubby, milk white pitcher that sat in the middle of our dinner table.

The warm tea flowed over the ice in my blue metal cup, popping the cubes with the sound of splintering glass. I gulped down the summer sweetness. The tea, still warm from the afternoon sun, mixed with the wintry slivers of ice danced down my parched throat. The last bits of ice clinked into my small white teeth only to be sucked in and noisily crunched with delight.



I sat at the yellow and white-flecked metal table, swinging sandaled feet that didn't come near the floor yet, peeling my sweaty legs off of the plastic seat of my chair. The excitement of my upcoming trip threatening to bubble out of my very pores as the plans my parents made swirled through the air. Great Grandma Cook—Ma Cook to everyone that knew her—was the sweetest grownup I knew. And in the baked dirt of her tiny front yard grew the biggest willow tree I had ever seen. It was like a huge umbrella, sheltering me from sultry southern summer sun and soaking surprise showers. I loved that tree almost as much as I loved Ma Cook.

The willow must have already been there when the dinky little home grew from the dusty earth to house my Grandma's family. It was a shotgun house built in the early 1900's. The name told volumes with few words. A man could shoot a shotgun in the front window and the silver streak would zip right through the house to the back door without hitting anything, as each room sat in an arrow straight line with the next. The house never grew, never even had indoor plumbing. But my willow never stopped trying to reach the sky with its branches.

I sat in anticipation in the shade of a much smaller maple tree in our front yard as Mom ironed and folded my shorts and sleeveless shirts on the appointed traveling day. Nestling each of them into her cornflower blue suitcase, they kept company with her skirts and blouses and Dad's starched shirts. Snowy white underpants and ruffled baby doll pajamas waited on the bed to join the freshly ironed garments. I had already packed a sack from the grocery store, that read "Piggly Wiggly" on the sides, with my favorite books; a new box of Crayolas and a stack of the scrap paper dad brought me from the mill where he worked.

The anticipation of the trip vibrated in the humid air until I could hardly stand still with the hum of excitement surrounding me. My job was to watch for Grandpa's shiny black Ford to roll down the street. About six that evening, I was rewarded with the sight of the car crawling around the corner like a giant beetle, crunching to a stop in front of our house. I jumped up and down in anticipation of seeing how much my tree had grown since last year, and wrapping my arms around Ma Cook once again.

The five of us set out in the oppressively hot car as the sky blossomed into a sunset that appeared as a salmon pink carnation on the horizon. Grandma said that was a good sign. According to the Good Book, red sky at night was sailor's delight. It was going to be a nice day tomorrow, with nary a cloud in the heavens.

Dad rode in front with Grandpa. I was sandwiched between Grandma and Mom, trying not to fidget as I stared at the back of my Grandpa's spiky red flattop. Dad half turned, talking to his father as we traveled the night roads south. Some place between the gas station we stopped at to fill up with ethyl,



and the rest area we stopped at to stretch our legs as Mom called it—even though we really stopped to relieve ourselves—I lost the fight to keep my eyes open.

As the car slowly crunched over the gravel ruts that sufficed for the road to Ma Cook's, I awoke with a start. Subconsciously, I recognized the sound of coming home. Rubbing the sleep from my emerald eyes, I crawled unto Grandma's lap to see my tree. Grabbing the top of the window, I pressed my nose to the glass. There, shimmering in the full moon, she waited for me.

As tall as any building I'd ever seen, she seemed to bow and dance in the breeze that blew the silver green tendrils of her branches gently in the night air. While the grownups tended to the bags and suitcases, I ran underneath the flickering emerald sea of leaves to hug the gnarled trunk.

As I laid my flushed cheek against the cool deep ruts of bark, Ma Cook popped through the leaves to welcome me. I turned from the rough tree to bury my head in her soft cotton dress as she drew me close to her.

"Child, you have grown as much as my tree since I saw you last summer!" she exclaimed.

I grinned as she held me at arm's length to check out every inch of me from my corn silk ponytail held together with a green rubber band to my bare feet with the rosy pink nail polish I had insisted on wearing for the trip. She pulled me in for another hug, and I inhaled the sweet smell of the south. Sugary talcum powder and cinnamon seemed to puff up from the folds of the flowered dress. The gentle fabric held the scent of the summer sun that had dried the colors to soft pastels. A deeper breath brought smells of the dusty, baked earth, the blood red roses growing by the sloping front porch and the hint of coal dust that clung in the air like a sad reminder of the only way to make a living in the impoverished town.

Ma Cook clasped my hand and led me across the rocky, moonlit yard into the welcoming light of the house. Cousins, aunts, uncles and neighbors had gathered in that teeny living room to greet us northerners. Among exclamations of how much I'd grown, how thin my mom looked—would she like a piece of homemade peach pie?—and how my dad looked just like his uncle Lyman as a boy, we were enveloped in the warm arms of extended family. Once again my eyes grew heavy as the clink of coffee cups and the soft laughter of my relatives lulled me to sleep.

Hot rays of sun shining through the sparkling windowpanes of Ma Cook's living room teased my eyes open the next morning. I had been covered with a soft cotton quilt that had bits and pieces of fabric from Ma and Pa Cook, deftly sewn in intricate patterns by Ma Cook's steady hand. Kicking her handy work into a little ball at my feet, I ran to the door to see my tree in the light.



If she was awesome in the moonlight, daylight showed her true majesty. Cricking my neck, I shielded my eyes from the blinding morning sun to see the top of her branches.

Ma Cook came up quietly behind me. "Good morning, Sugar." She smoothed my tangled hair with a wrinkled, loving hand. "Come on into the kitchen and get yourself a corn muffin before you go runnin' out to that tree of yours."

My bare feet slapped hard wood floors worn smooth with age. Hand braided rugs, made of the fabrics too dark for quilts curled like snails in the center of each room. Entering the happy yellow kitchen, I greeted Grandma and Mom and attempted to grab a muffin and escape in one swift movement. Mom was faster, snatching my hand as I reached for the golden stack of muffins that sat in the middle of Ma Cook's table.

"Your pink shorts and matching shirt are on the bed in the front bed room. Bring me the hairbrush and rubber band so we can do your hair, and brush your teeth at the kitchen sink. I pumped you a basin of water."

I rushed from the miniature kitchen to do what had to be done to get outside to my tree. Tossing on shorts and shirt, I grabbed the brown handled hairbrush from Mom's suitcase. Pausing just a minute to grab the sack I had packed before leaving home, I raced to the kitchen out of breath thrusting the brush and band at Mom.

Teeth and hair both brushed and inspected, I was finally free to go outdoors. The steamy southern air smacked me in the face as soon as I opened the door. Lugging my sack and Ma Cook's quilt, I parted the shimmering sea of leaves that hung from long whips and stepped inside the coolness the tree created. The long, lithe branches hung away from the tree a good three feet, creating a circular cool playroom just for me.

I smoothed the quilt and leaned back against the trunk that had grown so big my grandfather's arms couldn't even reach around it. Pulling treasures from my sack one after another, I arranged them around me. With a satisfied sigh, I gazed at the semicircle of happiness surrounding me. The new box of crayons sat to my right. Next to the rainbow of thirty-two bright colors with never used pointed tops, a snow white fan of papers awaited the masterpieces that were sure to be created over the next few days. Next came my lovingly worn copies of the adventures of Nancy Drew and her friends Bess and George. Lastly, my stuffed monkey Jocko lolled on his back gazing up through the leaves of the willow staring at the waves of heat radiating above the tree in the July sun. His brown fur rubbed smooth from hugs



and tears, he grinned back at me with his wide monkey mouth, seemingly as happy as I was to have the day before us to spend as we wished.

The minutes beneath my willow stretched into lazy hours that melted into days. The warm dappled sunlight under the sheltering willow baked my fair skin to a golden brown in the week we stayed at Ma Cook's. Interspersed with my serene tree hours were rowdy family picnics with cousins I played and fought with every summer, and comfortable family dinners on Ma Cook's front porch.

On the last morning of our visit, I sat at Ma Cook's feet in the cool shade of the willow, shelling green peas. "Did you have a good time, Sugar?" her reedy voice asked.

"Yes ma'am. But I wish I could take my tree home with me. It gets hot at home too, and our maple isn't near big enough to keep me cool," I whined.

"Little one, this tree couldn't grow if you tried to uproot it now. Just like your old Ma Cook. All of my kids, your Grandma included, want me to leave this house that I have lived in for forty years. Pa Cook and I raised all seven of our kids here, did you know that?" She smiled down at me brushing a wispy white hair back into its little bun. "I am like that old willow. My roots are wide and deep, and even though there isn't much here in this little town, it's enough for me. Just like this old cracked yard is enough for our willow."

With a gentle smile she picked up her apron in one hand, protecting the newly shucked peas and reached for me with the other outstretched palm. I held her tight as we ducked under the willow's waterfall of fluttering silver backed leaves that we both loved so much. Kicking up little puffs of dust with our feet, we headed to the tiny house brimming with memories of summers gone by and anticipation of those yet to be. I glanced back at the willow that bowed and waved to me in the warm summer breeze, and understood.





MAPLE SEED: A LOVE POEM

Marjorie Maddox

As children we called them "whirligigs,"
half wings of brittle leaf
seeded down with spin
click-clicking the air like a week of cicadas
hurled into our midsts
by fists of trees tired of clenching
such drunken dancers
delirious with spring.

We could only fling out
our arms; with their whole selves
whipping within/without the molecules of wind
they pitched to-and-fro our hearts, hope, our half-wish always
for death dizzy as the dawn exhaled by the first day of summer
senselessness and sorrow. Or joy.

Plague-like in their locust swarm,
today they play the breeze for a buffoon,
banter and clamor increasingly, then settle
seconds later on my hair, book, in the glass
of orange juice I raise
to such swift churning.

This is the frenzy of our faith no longer
frenzied, the fine filaments
of what clips us from the other,
from each other, and lets the twirl slow,
the not-final floating that lets love sprawl
on the green grass,
grow, spin, fall, grow.





Deer Hiding



MAPLES

Micheal Scott

As I crossed the weedy yard to the shack, my palms were warm against Ma's pan of soup, but a cold wind stung the backs of my hands. When I knocked at the front door, I had no way of knowing that this was to be the last time I would ever see Burt. I was thinking only of my futile attempt to talk Ma out of sending me down to his place.

I was nine and we still lived in Michigan, back in that fall of 1964. Neither the cold nor the half-mile walk from our farm had anything to do with my reluctance. I wouldn't have admitted it back then, of course, but I was a little afraid of Burt.

Whenever I saw him on the road, he was always wearing his gray cowboy hat and his high rubber boots, with a burlap sack slung across one shoulder. He was over eighty years old, but he still made the one-mile walk into town every day. If he saw me, he would glare at me, his blue eyes blazing with anger or hostility or menacing, I wasn't sure which. Then he would nod his head without saying anything, managing to make even a simple greeting seem unfriendly.

The front door of his shack was half window and half wood. When I knocked again, I was surprised to see him coming to the door in his heavy overcoat. Ma had said he wasn't feeling too well, so I had assumed he'd have to miss his trip to town for once.

When he answered the door, I was shocked at his snow white hair—I realized I had never seen him without his hat.

"Ma sent you some barley soup." I was nervous because I wasn't sure if he even knew who I was. "I'm Jason Wing. My ma has been stopping by to see you."

I thought maybe he didn't remember Ma. She had warned me that he sometimes couldn't remember anything from yesterday, only things from many years ago.

He stepped back and opened the door wider, so I went inside. When he closed the door behind me, I felt uneasy. I had never been inside the shack before. I could hear the wind outside, but the only sound inside was the ticking of a clock.

He took the soup and put it on an old pot-bellied stove by the door. "I reckon I'll heat that for supper," he said. "Right now I've got some tradin' to do in town. I'm out of coffee, and I'll be damned if I can survive even one day without the stuff."

He was wearing his high rubber boots as he shuffled over to the unmade bed at one end of the shack. Then he stopped and looked around, searching for something.



I noticed his gray cowboy hat on the floor by the dresser. I thought maybe that was what he was looking for, so I picked it up and took it over to him.

As he opened the door to the shack, he said, "So you're the football player:"

I was amazed. "Yes, sir," I said. I wasn't really a football player. I was in flag football on Saturday mornings. but I wondered how he knew.

"I saw a football game once," he said, as I followed him outside.

His trips to town had worn a path across the yard, and when he began to follow it to the road, I went with him. I don't know why I did. He didn't invite me, and I never asked if I could go.

"Friend and I took the train from Maples to Ann Arbor to see Michigan play the University of Chicago," he said as we walked. "I left at halftime. I told my friend I could see the same thing at home for free. All I had to do was toss an ear of corn in amongst the hogs. One of them would pick it up and run with it and the others would chase him. Then another one would grab it and they'd all chase *him*."

I didn't know what to say. I got the feeling he didn't want me walking with him. I thought about just taking off running, but I didn't have the nerve to.

The blacktop road tunneled between two rows of maples that lined the road all the way to town. The bare branches swayed and creaked overhead in the cold wind. A row of black trunks was outlined against the gray clouds to the west. I shivered to think the clouds might be bringing snow.

We walked along in silence until we got to the Carrs' house. The old farmhouse stood back from the road surrounded by big maples. The Carrs had just moved from Lansing. They were putting on white aluminum siding with green shutters on all the windows. Behind the house they were having a swimming pool dug.

I remembered Ma saying Burt had once lived in the house and farmed a hundred and sixty acres.

"They're fixing the old place up nice," I said.

He clumped along the blacktop in his rubber boots, never looking at the house as we passed. When we had passed it he said, "That place was built by a major in the Confederate Army, don't you know. He came up here after the Civil War. As soon as he finished the house, he shot himself."

I looked back at the house. "It looks nice," I said, quietly. "Especially with the row of trees in front."

He didn't say anything. When I looked at him, he was staring straight ahead down the road. "You know how those trees got there, don't you?" he asked.

"No." One time I had asked Dad who had planted the rows of trees. He had said Johnny Mapleseed.

We had reached the top of the big hill a half-mile from town. Through the trees, I could see the first houses down at the edge of town.



Beside us was the big sign I had seen the other day, the one announcing the Maple Row Mobile Home Park. In the open field along the road, wooden stakes were everywhere, their orange plastic streamers fluttering in the breeze.

"My Pa and Virgil Tapp and I planted most the trees along this road," he said. "That was eighty years ago. One day Pa just decided it would be nice if the whole road was lined with trees. So we started planting maples all the way from town to the county line—almost three miles. It took us two years to do it, working whenever Pa could spare the time. Pa had to do most of the work, since I wasn't but eight years old, and Virgil was only twelve."

"They really look nice," I said. "Everybody says so."

"Why sure they do," he said, a trace of a smile on his face. "You know, years ago, this town was called Berlin. But then we went to war with the Nazis, and somebody said maybe we should change the name of the town. By then, our maples had gotten big, and everybody remarked how pretty they were. So somebody suggested we rename the town Maples. And a lot of folks thought it was a good idea."

He started walking down the hill toward town and I followed him. I noticed his blue eyes were now rimmed in red and filling with tears.

"Not everybody wanted to change, of course—you know how people are. So we decided the only fair thing to do was to have an election." He paused to wipe his nose with a handkerchief, and he made a couple of quick dabs at his eyes. "The new name won by two votes. Virgil and I always said ours were the two votes that decided it."

I remembered hearing stories about the election, and I knew Grandpa Wing had voted against the new name. But I had never known that Burt had had anything to do with it.

Just as we reached the bottom of the hill a car came speeding down and roared past us. It was full of high school kids; I could hear them laughing and shouting through the open windows. The wind from the car blew Burt's hat off. I picked it up, brushed it off and handed it to him. He put it on and stared down the road, watching the car as it raced into town.

"I always had me a horse when I was young, but I wouldn't ride one on this road now."

When we got to the edge of town, the sidewalk started, so we followed it. Burt's row of maples was between us and the street. The sidewalk rose, climbing a small hill beside the street, the blacktop was about ten feet below us as we walked. It looked like a black river through the trees.

The rows of maples ended when we came to the business district. We walked on past the Elite Theater. Weeds had grown in the cracked sidewalk in front. The theater's doors were boarded up and the glass in the ticket window had a big, jagged crack that looked like a bolt of lightning.



From there, a hill sloped down to the railroad tracks. As we crossed the tracks, we could see the old depot sitting abandoned, some of its windows broken. Beyond that stood the huge, ghostly white shape of the empty silo that had been the Maples Milling Company.

"This used to be the most important town in the county. Trains used to stop at that depot every day. Why, we even had an opera house, don't you know."

A man we met on the sidewalk smiled at us. Burt glared at him, then pointed to a crumbling brick building across the street. "The old Ford Garage used to be an opera house."

The man nodded, then hurried away down the sidewalk.

Byerly's Foodland was an old brick building. Big paper signs in the windows advertised special prices. But the prices weren't special enough because most of the people in Maples did their grocery shopping in Lansing.

Inside the store Burt picked up coffee and sugar and a few other things and brought them to the checkout counter at the front. Mr. Byerly, the owner, rang everything up on the cash register. Then he took an index card out of a small metal file and wrote something on it. He slid the card across the linoleum counter-top and Burt signed it.

After Burt put his groceries into the burlap sack and slung it over his shoulder, he picked up a Hershey bar. "Put this on my bill," he told Mr. Byerly and handed the Hershey bar to me.

On the way home, we saw the smoke right away. It was billowing up above the bare treetops in the distance. Burt got worried. He asked if I remembered whether he had put the soup on the heat before we left. I said I didn't think he had.

When we reached the top of the big hill outside town, we could see that the smoke wasn't from his shack. An orange pickup from the county road commission was parked along the shoulder. Two men were standing in the shallow ditch beside the road. Both of them had chain saws and they had cut down one of the big maples. As we came up, one of the men buzzed his saw and cut a branch from the fallen tree. He tossed it onto a fire that was burning in the ditch.

"Here, now, what do you think you're doing?" Burt shouted from up on the road.

I was afraid he might go down in the ditch and try to stop them.

The man holding the silent chain saw looked up at us. "Just cutting a little firewood," he shouted above the whining of the other saw.

"You can't do that!" Burt shouted.

"I'm afraid I can, Pops. It don't matter because all these trees are gonna have to go anyway."

Burt stared at him without saying anything, so I asked, "Why?"

The man jerked his thumb at the big sign announcing the Maple Row Mobile Home Park. "This



time next year, there'll be fifty trailers along here. That'll mean a lot more traffic on this road, so the county is going to widen it."

I looked over to see what Burt would say, but he was already staggering up the road toward his shack. I ran after him.

Neither of us said a word as we walked across the yard and went inside the shack. He sat down without taking off his hat and coat. It was almost dark in there. I started to light a lamp, but he asked me not to.

"Tell me more about the old days," I said, sitting down on a footstool in front of him.

"Those days are gone," he said. "It doesn't do any good to keep talking about them."

He sat staring into the shadows.

"I can heat up your soup," I said.

He shook his head. "You better go," he said. "I need to rest."

It was chilly in the shack, so I stoked the glowing embers in the stove and added some coal before I left. When I looked at him, I noticed something strange. Maybe it was because of the poor light, but the color seemed to have faded from his blue eyes, and his pale face and white hair made him look weird, almost like a ghost.





MCCMAHON'S TREE

Vincent J. Tomeo

A cutting from a peach tree
Binds a generation
In a garden's growth

See a family in a tree
As juicy sweet as a peach

Pink brown gold adorn
A canopy of dark green leaves

Sit under a tree smell sweet dew of life
Feel sticky sap of fuzzy fruit
Touch history.





A fool does not see the same trees a wise man sees.
—*Rick Hilles*



MOMENT
for Leo

Myrna Goodman

From my kitchen window, I watch the Tree Life
men do their country ballet. One dances with rope

as the other saws the dry and wincing branches
of a beloved cherry tree inclined too far to catch

the sun. Some expert cuts to the trunk, the tree
hesitates a moment as if to have one last look

around before collapsing along the winter slope.
Turning from the window, I recall how bending

down to tie his bowling shoe, my father lost
his balance reaching for the meaning of his

last living moment on this indiscriminate earth.





MY BIG TREE

Liz Logan

My big tree
Is a piece of me
I keep it deep inside.
And when I'm scared
Behind its trunk
I hide
I
Hide
I hide.





I am myself and what is around me. And if I
do not save it, it shall not save me.
—*Jose Ortega y Gasset*



MY TREE



Burt Rashbaum

I went back to my old neighborhood,
thinking it would make me feel good
to walk the walk and talk the talk,
find old faces, feel the old places,
and see my tree,
this beautiful towering maple
already full height when my father,
now long gone but young in memory,
moved us into that house
of brick
on that block,
in my city.



I wanted to show my son
the tree I'd climbed,
strong branches that gave me comfort,
heights from where I surveyed
my street, was gloriously hidden
and somehow always safe
even as high as our roof,
almost touching the sky.

And my initials carved in its
immortal trunk
that would forever stand
from season to season,
a testament to a little boy's faith
in the future,
in the present,
in the past,



knowing my tree would long outlast
the man now grown,
living far away
a different life than the one
I'd imagined when I took
knife to bark to record
the year, the day, the way
I'd become one with my tree
from that day on.

It was pouring rain
when we pulled to the curb
and stepped out before
a house that now
seemed small to me.
It was larger once, I'd swear,
the porch, the stoop, the bushes.
Where were the kids playing street games,
or splashing in puddles
wearing yellow slickers and
real black rubbers on their feet?
Where was my mother
calling me home,
pulling me out of some reverie
as I hugged the limbs and
slithered down my tree?
What had happened?

I stood there, holding my son's hand,
staring at a rotted stump, an empty space,
a place forever changed by an unknown hand.
The front door opened, a small black boy
peered out at my alien white face





as tears begin to form and
questions clouded my mind.
He came down the steps I knew so well.
My son and he, the same age, from
different worlds, stared at each other
with fascination and wonder.
"Where's the tree?" I asked him, myself, my son.

"The other folks, the ones before, cut it down,"
he said, more to my boy than me,
"they dint like it no more. They cut it down.
Who are you?"
I was struck dumb,
the space before this house too large,
unfilled, devoid, changed in such a way
I couldn't say a word.
"He used to live here," said my son,
"this tree was his."



But no more.
What should have stood,
lived longer than
I could have thought
was gone, insanely destroyed
by those I could not know,
for reasons unfathomable.
This was something horrible
and I sat on the stump and cried.

The boys stood by me as each,
without a word,
put a hand on my shoulder,
while I wept for what was no longer,



for what they would never have
or know,
for a future
that had been ripped
away.

"This can't be," I wailed. "It's like
something's been amputated.
If I could get my hands on them, I'd,
I don't know what I'd do."

"Mister," the black boy said,
"You know, every spring here
flowers grow. I never knew your
tree, but this is where I live, so
that has to be good enough, you see?"



I didn't. Something had been shattered.
My heart ached, my head pounded,
I no longer knew what mattered.
Why didn't they love it, give it care,
let it grow? What had it done? What crime?
"Hey," the black boy said, "it's okay.
You and your boy got each other."
There's still love, I thought, is that enough?
"Martin!" came a call.
"I got to go, that's my mother."
"Come on dad," said my son, who took my hand.
I stood and wiped my face,
and knew I'd never again know this place,
or be back, and felt an emptiness
at that dark hour.

I didn't understand anything:
Not life, myself, my boy, my wife



Nor time, the past, right now,
my dreams, and only knew
that nothing is ever what it seems.
Everything changes, life goes on
without me, if I so choose,
or with me, waiting in the wings.

We walked back to the car,
leaving behind an empty space.
"You know," my son mused,
"I'll only ever know this place
as it is now, for what it's worth.
But don't stop telling me about
your tree, so I'll remember
how it was for you, and
how the earth once changed
forever."

I brought the car to life,
and drove into the future,
where my son would grow to
be a man, where
I would die one day but
love would last
beyond all knowing,
even if I couldn't say.





NAMES OF TREES

Anne Coray

Space may not be endless
no more anyway, than forest
which had always seemed free and forever,

Like the names of trees:
 hemlock, sequoia, cedar,
 sycamore, juniper, fir...

How they blew over and through us,
as if they were dreams, uncindered, unlatched—
though we may not have lived

where they flourished, may never have touched
their blue-green needles or flat broad leaves,
or walked in their shadows, cooled.

Because they summered in us as sound:
 catalpa, ash, black cherry,
 hickory, maple, spruce...

So we almost imagined them formless,
ridge and valley a flow unstilled,
for belief was always in reclamation,

belief was always in beyond.
We'd learned a beauty, yes
a beauty akin to a distant star

that pulsed like an echo, echo—
 O tamarack, walnut, poplar,
 O beech, O pine, O birch, white oak...





Of the infinite variety of fruits which spring from the bosom of the earth, the trees of the wood are the greatest in dignity.

—*Susan Fenimore Cooper*



NATURAL-EL

Kent Clair Chamberlain

Skies dark,
Rumble in contrast to
White
Magnolias.





NATURE'S WAY

Al Pace

On my way into his nursery, I noticed Henry Bauer's car parked in the driveway, so I figured the time had come to pay up what I owed him. For several months, he had let me dump brush on his low-lying acreage for considerably less than a reasonable rate. Since I rarely found him home, the money had been accumulating in my bank account instead of his. It would take a real fool to blow a deal like I had here. No sense in making him wait any longer, maybe even piss him off.

He was watching a Red Sox game on TV so I told him how many loads I had dumped, translated that into dollars, and counted it out from my wallet. He waived it aside.

"Wait a minute," he said without taking his eyes from the set. "I got a proposition for you."

During the commercial break, he asked if I would mind working it off. It would only take one Saturday of my own choosing. As a landscaper, he didn't have any tree climbers on his payroll. Recently one of his clients had requested pruning on some of his larger trees. Naturally Bauer didn't want to refer him to someone else, but a buzzy king like me doing my side jobs on weekends didn't threaten his business. We'd done this sort of thing before, and it had always worked to our mutual advantage. As far as the client knew, I could've been just another arm of Bauer's operations.

"You can leave the brush right where it lies," Bauer said. "My boys can clean it up on Monday morning. If it takes you less than a day, your debt is still paid. If you have to go back for another day, I'll pay you the going rate."

"Good deal," I said.

He gave me directions to an estate in Dover. "I think you'll find this guy pretty interesting. He's from Germany. One of the sharpest minds you'll ever meet."

I saw little to distinguish Bauer's customer from the other suburbanites I normally dealt with, except maybe a little older than the most. But you didn't get to own a chunk of property this size in Dover unless you had a hell of a lot on the ball. Either that or you inherited it from your Boston Brahmin ancestors. The accent seemed to rule that out.

"Dese trees by de house und guest houses, ve vant to even dem up." He made funny line chopping movements with his hands.

To me, few, if any, of their limbs looked particularly long or out of line, but I ventured my best guess. "You want me to pull in some of those long ends, eh?"



"Nuut exactly. If you get up into dis first vun on de right, I tell you vat to do, okay?"

None of the trees presented any difficulties as far as climbing went. In no time at all, I tied myself into the one he had pointed out, a medium-sized red oak.

"Now gue down," he said. "Ja, dat's it. No, furder. Keep going."

At his direction, I descended on my lifeline through the tree, stopping only to see him wave me even farther downward until I was dangling in my saddle over its lowest limb. It projected diagonally out over the lawn.

"Gut. Now cur dat off. Ja, right dere at de trunk."

It took but a moment to haul up the chainsaw. It started on the second pull, and I leaned forward to make my undercut. Sawdust sprayed out from the top of the bar in a wide arc across the lawn. I jump-cut the offending limb, and it fell flat upon the grass. Then I flushed the stub.

I turned to the man running the show. "This old tree could use a good deal of thinning. You do want me to go back up and clean out the dead wood, don't you?" I asked.

"No, no, no." He shook his head. " That's nuet necessary. Come down and ve move on."

He directed me into the next tree in line. Virtually all of the trees, mostly red oaks, had lower limbs growing out randomly towards one point of the compass or another, and he wanted them lopped off. So that's what he meant by "evening dem up."

I got the hang of it before long, all the time wondering if Bauer had any idea how easily he was letting me discharge my debt. Any greenhorn could've taken care of it for him. The client had to man a lowering line for the occasional limb overhanging a roof; other than that, I could have done the job in my sleep. I couldn't help feeling it was a waste of my time though. When you run into a job like this, you just relax and tell yourself: as long as he's footing the bill, the customer is always right.

A few hours later, we were sitting in the shade drinking Lowenbraus and admiring the day's work—such as it was. The German held out his arms as if he could embrace the scene. "You see, how much bedder dey look now. Symmetry is de ting." He held up his forefinger. "Dat is God's vay, nature's vay. Is it not?"





Trees Reflect the Seasons



NEW ENGLAND TREES

Brianne Killoran

"Listen," she said nearly silently
"and you can hear them breathing."
Wind drew through the Maple leaves,
rattling back out again.

"They dance when you
are not watching." She waved
a hand fluidly through the air
to imitate their bowing bodies.

Even now, years after, in the quiet
of my home at night, I hear the tips
of their branches tapping
a staccato beat on my windowpane,
their bristles brushing against
the glass with ease.

In my mind, I see the pines sway
like her small white hand's path
through the air, as crickets with bellies
full of song accompany their dance.





NO, IT WASN'T A TYPO!

Mark Robbins

It's a sturdy tree with leaves that gaily wig-wag in the breeze.
It's a hardy tree, to boot, with a far, out-reaching root.
It's a fertile tree that thrives everywhere floating seedling billions
through the air.
It's a tough-grained tree to the saws, with unwelcome knots and
splintery flaws.

Its seeds and its leaves clutter gutters and eaves.
Its roots seek out drains which they clog when it rains.
And its wood's
No good!
So that's why the poplar
In cities was never popular.





I never knew the full value of trees. Under them
I breakfast, dine, write, read and receive my
company.

—*Thomas Jefferson*



NOVEMBER

Tom Absher

Bringing wood in
from the shed
I hear a whisper
behind me,
a hush-like speaking
which causes me to turn
and I realize it is wind
in the white pines,



making a whistling sound
you make when telling
a fairy tale to children
imitating the wind
passing through tree branches,
with their millions
of pine needles
filtering the air like screens
in the mouths of whales

but here the music
they have filtered out
is a song, singing to me:

*snow, snow is coming, it is here,
on your housetop, on your doorstep,
all around your house tonight,
snow is coming—*



and I am delighted at this song
not for its message
but because finally at my age,
I have understood
some of the language
of pine trees.





NURSERY

Daniel Williams

I hiked into the grove preparing
Myself to be depressed
Looking for someone—something
To blame

At first I was taken by the sight
Of two mature sequoia on their sides
Botanical wreckage all around
Green cones and spiked foliage

Then as I hiked from the bottom
Of the trees to their tips
I noticed a huge hole in the canopy
Silver sky with light flakes falling

And at the massive base of each tree
Fresh churned soil dark and fervent
Huge root bolus holes filled
With sweet water

Already hundreds of tiny brown oats
In mica rich mud—with wide open sky
Above them a nursery for a distant future
When this joyful heart can no longer beat





Trees are your best antiques.
—*Alexander Smith*



OAK SHADOW

Pearse Murray

You must have been a century old then
when, annoyed about something or other,
my nine-year-old body climbed into you.
Into all your leaf-green hug-shadow
and crawled on all limb bending-bough.
Listened in on bird song
soak-crackle of rain song
rush-rustle of wind song
And all in shimmering sun-glow.

Set sail on an oak ship.
Trawled in all sea-sick spread
Tossed around somewhere or other
below Neruda's shivering stars
(preferring your nervous leaves)
Disembarked onto cities wild while wildly
annoyed about something or other.

Somehow your lesson of steady-slow-steady
got me back to here now!

Now!

Now I am eighty-five, limb light and weak.
I see you now, all green and spread solid
as a two century time shadow
of recoming and regoing, bird, leaf
And me, mildly annoyed about something or other.





OCTOBER

Karen Lewis

Morning
sends a yawn
northward
night's slate blue back
retreats
trees stand
gasping
frost wrapped
warmth stirs
as sun lifts
frozen bonds dissolve



All at once
leaves release
and sink
in unison
I stand under
the unexpected
shower
my footprints
disappearing
under the thawing
touch of trees

I think of my mother
entering the broken place
between branch
and stem



I wonder
if she landed
somewhere welcome
a sense of smile
in a whirl
of wind

I open my hand
a stiff leaf settles
against my bare palm





You are a child of the universe, no less than the
trees and stars; you have a right to be here.
—*Desiderata*



OLD TREE

Dorothy Stone

Old tree,
strong elder on the block,
I return from vacation
to find
surgery has been done:
clean,
neat,
complete.
All branches gone,
the cuts, flush to the broad trunk,
startle in their raw newness.
Dead, I judge.
Another friend lost.
Younger trees on the street,
spared the surgeon's saw,
bud and bloom in spring abandon.
I raise my eyes
to my friend's newly topped height,
no longer promising summer shade—
and catch my breath.
New shoots
cluster at a point of strength;
push out,
leaf out,
defy amputation,
defy death.
And my ever dependable neighbor
offers me something better than shade,
more lasting than shade:
A lesson on how to face death,
on how to live life.
The details, he leaves to me.





Squirreled away
for a time of need,
my lesson was forgotten,
until one day I looked up
and laughed in delight.
The tree from top to bottom
was spiraled in green,
a feather boa
slung in leafy abandon.
Ah, so age can still surprise
as well as grit and bear it,
another lesson to bank on,
to call forth some future date:
Age can amaze.
Age can delight.

Ominous sound
awoke me next morn—
Out of bed
and at the window,
I saw what I feared.
I saw what I heard.
I did not stay to watch,
but should have.
I should have borne witness to its fall,
to its grinding consignment to chips.
When violation had ceased
I looked again:
What had been
feather-boa'd and gay
the day before
was now a hollow stump,
with but one jagged,
splintered piece pointing up,
screaming its protest.
Of course.



ON A LEAF

Kirby Congdon

In dance, or is it pain,
the leaf's quick flitter
strains against the breeze's passing chance
to rehearse catastrophes of hurricanes.
Its keen edge aims to split the wind,
the flat plane, to reflect the light
of sun or rain and, twisting, glitters,
and, battered, day or night,
would resist a weather's change.

Leaves would only want to show
their full-fashioned lives
in broad display
upon more quiet airs
in full repose, basking in support
of the extended branch's kind intention
before the stem, abrupt, lets go,
or gales agitate a world in turbulence
while roots, greedy,
reach out to grow
trees from their forebears
rotting beneath the snow.





Even the smallest woods have their secrets and
secret places, their unmarked precincts.
—*John Fowles & Frank Horvat*



ON THE DISAPPEARANCE OF A NEIGHBOR

William G. Ward

The chain saw snarling
The old tree screaming

The good earth trembling
The soft breeze sobbing

The black sky rumbling
Cicadas chanting

The skyful of birds shrieking for their gods.

The bees are forming for attack
The ancient rock has been awakened
The flowers have disappeared from sight.
The sun has shadowed its eyes.

Too late Too late
The old tree crashes to the ground
A final victory snarl from the saw
The shouts of men
A subterranean throb, or is it a sigh?

It is a massacre.

"How about that old cherry tree over there,"
says some man, saw swinging from his belt.
"Looks rotten to the core to me."





OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE SAME WORLD

Cynthia Drew

I'd felt the same way for so long I wondered if I was still alive or, having died one quiet night as I slept, why I floated even now through my placid reality. When I looked in the mirror each morning I hadn't aged perceptibly from the day before. The weather was always fine, hot or cold it suited my mood. Our refrigerator was full of food and there was plenty of gas in a dependable car. Truman, my husband of twenty-six years, purported to love me but for some time we'd behaved more as brother and sister than as married folks, simply preferring the company of each other to the company of anyone else. While I suspected he might not love me as he once had, I was content enough with our marriage. I'd retired two years earlier from a repetitive position as French teacher at a girl's school, a job I originally took to relieve our own childlessness. Instead of a new life of leisure and fulfillment what I discovered was the foe of unremitting monotony.

When I rose at seven, the rooms in our house were as ordered and without character as though no one lived in them: no dishes in the sink, no shoes at odd angles in the den. The toss pillows on the sofa were fluffed and set right, the doors on the television cabinet were closed. After breakfast I did the same things in the same sequence—took my vitamins, checked the weather, paid bills, tended to chores and errands, collected the mail at lunch, which was always at noon. Dinner was a rotation of similar dishes and at bedtime I read for half an hour before I went to sleep. I had variations on the same dreams and I knew what they meant. I wore clothes that look alike and talked to my sister at eleven every Sunday morning. I knew this could continue year after year, this iterate routine, always thinking the same things and eating the same things and saying the same things using the same words.

Yes, yes, you say, everyone does these things and feels the tedium, but surely you went out to dinner with friends, or went shopping for something that needed to be replaced or took a class or something—*something*—that changed your life in some small way. No, nothing altered this seamless familiarity, and it might have been that I wanted an escape from this comfortable futility just to feel my heart beat again.

After twenty-four years, 87 Fillmore was full of our docile lives. An idea that we needed a new house kindled and I began to shop. There were the usual false starts—unremarkable, poorly made boxes that bore no personality, structures that said nothing about their people. There were some inaccessible houses at the tops of cliffs and places that had been on the market for years, houses that shouldn't have been built and ones that should be torn down.



During the days I hunted the new house, I had purpose, a reason to get up in the morning, not knowing what I would find during the day. No longer was lunch at noon, but wedged between showings. Dinner was whenever I returned in the evenings to present Truman with what I'd seen. Truman, let me say, wasn't enthusiastic about moving. He was loathe to leave everything that we'd put into the house on Fillmore. He wanted very much to allow life to continue as it had all these uninterrupted years.

Truman verged on being unhappy, writing contrary letters to the newspaper, yelling at the neighbor children, complaining to the grocery store manager about some glitch on aisle nine or a misunderstood comment made by the bag boy. My idea to move was his latest reason to grumble, but I knew moving, sorting, planning and painting would provide him with welcome distractions. I was willing to tolerate his occasional outbursts of misery to improve the backdrop of our marriage.

When I returned from house-hunting each evening, I found him sitting at the dining room table. He sat down to dinner at our customary time of seven whether a meal appeared at that time or not, a habit so old that it no longer irritated me.

One night, a week into my search, he leaned on the arms of his chair, looked at his watch and sighed, still dinnerless at seven-thirty. "Really, Claire," he said, "you won't find anything out there that this house doesn't have."

I rested against the counter in the kitchen, more worn down than worn out. "What about changing the view, Truman? Why not have a change for the sake of change?"

"I don't see the point. What is it you're looking for?"

"Better kitchen, bigger closets."

"Maybe then you could get dinner on the table at seven?" That was as close to tacit approval as Truman would come. He looked out the dining room window, narrowing his eyes on a featureless hillside behind the house that he kept mowed to a smooth green carpet.

"Maybe," I said. There was nothing else *to* say. After dinner we sat in the den watching reruns on television, enjoying the programs more by knowing the ends of the stories.

My realtor was a pleasant woman of about my own age, a retired teacher as well. She'd taken up this career to relieve the heaviness of her time and had been instilled with an irrepressible realtor tendency to overestimate our buying power. I lowered the price I wanted to pay for a house, knowing that she would increase the level of what we looked at by some goodly percentage. Even then I ended up looking at houses that were beyond our means, although they were the most interesting. I figured we would find the money for whatever house it was that I truly liked, so I went along.



Vacant houses, empty of furniture, are easy to view without the complications of other people's lives. Forensic puzzles of the former occupants—where they placed the furniture, why the holes in the walls are where they are, what caused the dark stains on the bedroom carpet or the kitchen walls. An empty house is accountable to no one but the people standing in it. A house that is still occupied is more Byzantine. You're trespassing in occupied houses, an interloper peering into another existence.

When you open the doors of a stranger's house you see their lives: their photographs on the mantel, their choice of furniture, how they keep the place and what they read, but they never see you. You open closets and cabinets and discover their thought processes—how things are organized, where they're stored. At that point in my life there was something in that very *flaneur* attitude that appealed to me, and consciously or unconsciously, I began to select occupied houses to consider. I wanted to live, if only for a moment, in someone else's life. What I was assessing was not so much the houses as their realities. You view someone's past, all of their belongings and their keepsakes, as though they've died, or vacated the life you see before you. And in some small sense you see someone's future—you're in their home before they themselves see it next. It felt like time travel, ringing of an obligation not to move anything for fear of changing some approaching cycle of events.

The realtor and I remarked upon photos and books and unusual or extraordinary furniture as we moved from house to house, always looking for hints to how many people inhabited the place, how old they were, what they did for a living, what colors they preferred. It was a guessing game, reckoning people's lives, so that the spaces themselves were more easily understood. A tall, brown house bore sticky rings on its kitchen countertop from a morning's cereal bowl, newspapers littered the floor near an overstuffed chair and an elaborate collection of cufflinks were displayed high on a bookshelf. Another house, painted green and tucked into the surrounding hill, sprouted profuse gardens of roses and crepe myrtle, lilies and ferns.

The house at 646 East Atlea was impossibly expensive and beautiful. Ceilings soared, floors gleamed, large windows let in a breathtaking view of the city. Before we came to the master bedroom, there was a baby's room. A girl, from the looks of it, a new baby. There was a changing table, a recliner, a small pink crib. Photos in the master bedroom were pictures of a lovely young woman in her wedding gown, the couple taking their vows, the couple on a cruise—their honeymoon? A large portrait hung over the bed of the couple with their new baby. As we looked, there grew to be many photos of the baby, the woman beaming while she held the infant, the man uneasily cradling the child. Baby pictures multiplied, covered the dresser, sat next to the bottle warmer by the refrigerator, nestled on the end tables in the living room.



There appeared to be just the three of them, parents and baby. The house was faultlessly clean, their literature ran to medical and self-help volumes rather than fiction and magazines. I chose to believe the woman was a nurse—to account for the reading material, the cleanliness, the nurturing order to the baby's room. But there were medications in a basket in the kitchen, prescriptions lying on the counter, medical supplies near the jars of baby food.

I returned to the master bedroom. There was nothing that shouldn't have been there in a healthy household, no pill bottles on the night stand or evidence that someone spent inordinate amounts of time in bed—a comforter or robe laid out, slippers tucked under the edge, piles of mail on the floor. But there were obvious clues—a book on a bedside table titled *Living with Cancer Patients: A Day to Day Guide*, a plaque on the dresser attesting to a baby who had survived chemotherapy, a print hanging on the wall of a woman holding a baby up to heaven, with an epigram at its base to the loving parents of a sick child. All these were dated two years ago—the child in the photos was still on formula, newborn. There were no pictures of a baby past roughly three months.

At dinner that evening, that being our evening to have chicken, I was unable to tell Truman about the house on East Atlea, not wanting to hear him carp about the asking price or protest once more about our moving at all. I found myself unwilling to talk about the current owners and the difficulty with their child. I wasn't sure why I couldn't share this secret with the man who was my daily companion but the story wouldn't dislodge itself from my heart.

The following day I moved through my menial routine: emptying the dishwasher, making the bed, putting out the papers, shopping for dinner; things done so automatically that I paid them no notice as I brooded. That afternoon I called the realtor to ask about seeing the house on East Atlea again.

When we arrived the next morning it felt as though I hadn't left. My attention resumed where it had last lingered, in the kitchen. I began opening cabinet doors and closets not so much to see how the storage space was organized, but what I could learn of the lives of those three people. What the realtor did as I rummaged and explored I didn't know. I stopped only at opening the private pieces of furniture—those things that wouldn't convey with the house—dressers, hampers, backpacks hanging on the garage wall.

The most telling information was in plain sight—the prescriptions on the counter: Prednisone for the baby, to fight the cancer, and Prozac, a mood elevator, prescribed for the baby's mother. I knew these drugs—they were given to my own mother as she battled breast cancer and again to my sister when she had Hodgkin's. Still, the prescriptions, receipts for medical supplies and labels on the pill bottles were nearly two years old. It seemed like I wasn't viewing a future in this house at all but a past that



had been jerked to a halt. As the realtor and I rode back to her office we were quiet, each knowing that the other had discovered some part of three lives that were meant to be promising yet had fewer guarantees than our own.

Truman could tell, over the turbot that was our Friday dinner custom for the several years, that I was preoccupied. I'm sure he thought it foretold the forthcoming New House, which would mean he should galvanize for action momentarily. His dark cloud of gloom began to move toward the dining room and I could do nothing to stop its progress, I was so mired in my own melancholy. Buying that house in order to stop the agony of the young couple was beyond our resources, but if it removed a demon from their lives I wanted to try.

That evening the realtor phoned to say that someone else had made an offer on the house and the couple had accepted it. I was relieved to finally report the ordeal to Truman. And while he groused over my meddlesome behavior he, too, was perturbed by the story's shapeless ending. I couldn't help but feel hollow, as if I had abandoned some usefulness that couldn't be reoccupied. That I was released from ruminating on this family was bewildering. I turned out the light at eleven that night without reading for half an hour and lay watching tree shadows dance on the far wall, wondering what had happened to the young couple and their child.

The following morning I overslept and instead of checking the weather on television I went into the yard with my tea. I looked at our house from the back, from the sides, from the front, recalling how much I wanted the house when we bought it twenty four years ago. It was better than anything I'd seen in the past few days.

I set my cup on the grass and began to climb the maple at the foot of the driveway, branch by branch, finding footing, reaching again. It was an easy climb and halfway up I reached the highest branch that would support my weight. I sat looking out through the confetti of maple leaves, remembering how we'd planted the spindly saplings twenty-some-odd years ago and nurtured them along. They're sturdy now, these trees, these sentinels along the edge of the driveway. I shifted my position this way and that, wishing for my teacup. I thought about Truman's disposition and my own bemused spirit, unable to isolate shivers of insight from the morning breeze, holding on as the wind rose, riding the currents with the limb.

Truman, probably attracted by the movement of the tree, came out and stared up at me, hands in his back pockets, clucking and nodding his head. He walked back toward the house and stood in the shade, staring at my maple, then came back to the tree and began to climb, finally reaching an opposite limb. The wind rose to his face and he caught his breath and grinned. It occurred to me that Truman hadn't smiled for years.



Holding onto branches over our heads or to our left or right, we surveyed the roof of our house, the roofs of the neighbors' houses and their back yards, gazing west toward the center of town and east, in the direction of the house on East Atlea.

Truman turned to scrutinize his green-carpeted hillside. "That hill needs a pine and a willow, maybe something to break it up, something with some texture."

The breeze came through the branches again and my mood lifted with it. "Something that grows fast," I said, "so that we can see it mature."

"Yes, that too." He pushed his lower lip out. "Tell me, Claire," he asked, "do you think we're maturing or just decaying?"

We talked about where our enthusiasm had gone and how we could go on, assuming we could first get out of the tree. We promised each other a trip to France in October, planned to clean closets, decided to put in new landscaping here on Fillmore next spring. And then we climbed down. It was one in the afternoon and we went out for lunch. Truman was convinced that he had saved me from a hazardous fall, but surely he had seen that I climbed down as easily as I went up. He must know that his real rescue was in the moment he cared enough to reach for the first branch of the maple tree that day.





Keep a green tree in your heart and perhaps a singing bird will come.
—*Chinese Proverb*



OUT ON A LIMB

Stephen Kopel

A slender sprig,
vivacious, daring,
yet, lacking top-most shoots,
Laurel left school
with long-time bud Douglas Fir
after she was voted
"Most Poplar"
in her juniper year;
first sprucing up the room
in which she sprouted roots,
even varathaning oak floors
for younger sis Magnolia

Her ma droned on and on
about getting lost or laid
in the dark forest
outside their door as a loaded Beetle
crawled away from the gate

"Hope I can forgive yew,"
she called out high in the
elm for one last view





OUT THE WINDOW

G. S. Bauman

Against the snow still white,
tree trunks, limbs and branches
register their bare, black statements,
reach, gesture, record the facts—
their form and line underlining
time spent in sun and rain,
which way the wind pressed,
spaces for spreading, how
they leaned, became crooked.
Branches rise, spread into tangle—
text in a scribble-scramble; high up
twigs scratch, dwindle, make dashes,
wandering signs in sky wind.
Leaves with winter-glint cling
in clumps or swing-dance
on passing gusts; others flutter
float like winter butterflies; some
worn out, shredded appear as crooked
question marks to a falling alphabet,
end their sentence in a gray-glare light.
They land—loose markings on snow,
spin and twist, disappear in gusts
or pile and stay as periods of time—
decay to become another beginning.





I resent the creation of a world
in which beauty is a reminder of
what we're losing, rather than a
celebration of what we've got.

—*Ben Elton*



PARTING

Pearl Karrer

Familiar sidewalks buckled
by last winter's freeze and thaw,
mined by roots,
stacatto with leaves—stepping

under beech, elm, sugar
maple, white oak I am
for an instant walking
home from school, mother's
stroke, unimagined, no cares
except algebra and a new
dress for the dance,

taking for granted her arms,
these branches that shelter
my path. Now I study
their tracery—scarlet,
copper and gold, the fires
of stained glass. The flames

fall in slow spirals—
*teach me how
to let go.*





PILGRIMAGE

Redwood Mary

I have had the incredible experience of living next to a pocket of a Coastal Redwood forest in Northern California. I loved to walk under these amazing trees. I can still close my eyes wherever I am and remember walking across a forest floor carpeted by layers of fallen needles that made the ground so soft to walk upon. Day after day I greeted these tall silent sentinels and watched them stir with the breeze or rock side to side with the wind. They stood stately steadfast and silently nodding, breathing, and witnessing.

I also have witnessed and walked amongst the ongoing destruction of the last two percent of the world's Redwood Forests. Just think! These trees had been here before Christ and before Buddha walked the earth. What stood for thousands of years was being cut in a few hours and the ecosystems were being destroyed to make decks for houses. That destruction is a story in itself.

At the time I was studying environmental sciences at the College of the Redwoods. One day, I could no longer sit in a classroom as I watched logging truck after logging truck carry away the trees whose ecology I was studying. I had enough of walking the dry sun baked barren lands that were once forest. They were not healing. I had written letters to agencies and officials, I participated in public hearings. I did all that citizens could do to try and stop some of this madness. In December of 1998 I had decided people outside of the redwood region needed to know what was happening. I put my belongings in storage and took "The Plight of the Redwoods Campaign" on the road for three and a half years to communities and college campuses across the country, and to international United Nations meetings.

I worked in partnership with two "tree sitters" who called into my presentations via speaker phone. Their stories and acts of peaceful civil disobedience were part of my goals to educate the audiences that were gathered. We were armed with nothing more than our personal stories, the facts and video footage of and about the destruction of these ancient forests. With Julia Butterfly Hill from her historic occupation of a thousand year old redwood giant above the village of Scotia and Ante Madsen from his tree sit in Freshwater, we would give first hand reports on the issues and speak of our passions to make a difference in the midst of destruction based on greed. On Dec. 18, 1999 Julia Butterfly Hill came down from her treetop perch and touched the ground for the first time in two years, in one of the most emotional moments of North Coast forest activism history. In August 1999, Nate Madsen joined Plight of The Redwoods, calling in from his over one year occupation of an magnificent ancient Redwood tree



he named Mariah. Before Nate's two year tree sit ended successfully, I had an opportunity to make my first ever climb. I visited Nate up on his platform high up in a beautiful old growth redwood tree, much higher than the Statue of Liberty, if you could picture that. It was an incredible experience that I tried to capture later that night in my journal. The following is my writings about that day.

Nature and her resources do not seem to be valued any more unless they can be bought or sold into some type of commodity. I am still finding words to adequately describe this sacred spiritual encounter. How can I explain my experience with a tree to people, whose preoccupation on the ground is with shopping, TV and other human centered activities?

Producers Patricia Lawrence and Star Decker of Travel Radio, an internationally syndicated radio program, agreed to "record" the story of my first ever "climbing ascent" up the 1000 year old growth tree that as an addition to an interview with Nate. Nate had been living amongst her branches on a platform nearly 20 stories above the ground—near the community of Freshwater in Humboldt County five miles east and north of Eureka, California. Tree sitting is the last resort, peaceful act of defense when all public advocacy efforts have failed to protect a forest area slated for destruction.

Tree climbing required strapping into and actually sitting in a harness, attached to secured climbing ropes dropped to me on the ground from above, similar to rock climbing gear. The goal was to place my feet, one into each of two loops, then sit back in my harness and use my hands and arm strength to pull myself up the climbing rope via mechanical climbing devices (rather than the usual prussic slip knots).

Sue, our climbing "trainer" broke her arm the night before so she could not demonstrate how I was to accomplish this. She instructed me verbally on what to do, yet I had no idea how I was going to maneuver in this strange contraption since I have never seen it done. Can I trust it? I knew I was afraid of heights. I asked myself, "Can I do this?" I touched the beautiful soft bark of Mariah at her base and looked up to her welcoming branches I knew the answer was "Yes." Sue expertly and patiently described and guided me through what I had to do.

As Nate set the ropes and dropped them from the platform high above, I learned how to set my own safeties with Sue's verbal teachings. I flayed about trying to get use to my feet in the ropes as I sat in the harness swinging around. Hardly making any progress off the ground, Star Decker described me as a newborn horse just learning to stand on its own legs! I felt silly and we laughed and then I got the hang of it.

"Step one foot into each loop like climbing stairs, pull up and slide up the rope," I was told, as I trusted the harness would hold me... "Let go and repeat the process over and over." Then I began to



ascend! Slowly—I climbed higher and higher and when I was three feet off the ground I received cheers from below...I was on my way!

I started the climb and let myself immediately take in the wondrous experience and it was exhilarating! Being present with my task, I took a deep breaths as I worked. I was going up this wondrous tree! Sharing this joy with Nate above me and the others below gave me the courage to go on. Reaching Nate's platform 180 feet up, and then dropping the ropes down for Star to climb might have been the designated goal, but little did I know that I was on a journey that transformed me every inch of the way.

I took my time climbing—resting suspended in my harness—each height that I ascended was a different perspective—visually, psychologically and spiritually. Since my hands did tire—I would take time to rest. I was soon out of range of the voices below. It was now just me and Mariah. I was attuned to the quiet. I savored the moment.

As I sat suspended in my harness at about 80 feet above the ground, I felt an incredible opening of my heart—I looked up Mariah's massive beautiful trunk and fell into an awed reverence. "How amazing you are," I said. Quietly I reached out to touch her bark, connecting with her, looking up into her outstretched arms as she distinctly whispered to me "You will be okay. I am with you." I wanted to cry and did for a moment—tears of joy and wonder and of being held in an embrace of love. Being a pragmatist never did I expect such a deep soul-moving experience.

As I maneuvered gently around Mariah's branching arms I noted subtle changes or intricacies—changes in leaf size and density; the soft skin of her bark, furry in places with moss, crusted in others with lichen. All so beautiful in texture in color. As I touched Mariah again I prayed and laughed and felt such incredible love and joy.

Nate would cheer, talk and joke with me and then joined in silent reverence. He let me do the work and allowed me my encounter with Mariah. He later came down part of the way to meet me.

As I reached the platform...Nate helped me up as my senses guided my feet in search of safe footing. My mind questioning "What was branch and what was platform and what was just air space under the heavy canvas that was his roof?" This was now tree space! Ground rules did not apply.

As I noted my physical parameters, I stepped into a world 180 ft. above the ground. As I stood there I gazed around slowly taking in the magical view surrounding me. In the distance, all was forest but my heart winced at the clear cuts below. Then it filled with joy at the beauty of vibrant life still standing firm and tall next to the destruction. I raptor swept across the sky before us. Then I noticed details. Nate had a minimalist home. Tarps for cover, a few lettuce plants potted and growing in an old milk jugs. A bicycle hung secured to a branch so he could exercise his legs!



I looked back out high above and across to the areas of intact forest again. I was hoping it would be that way forever. I was hoping someone would have the sense to keep it for the health of the watersheds below, so that the salmon and spotted owl could survive. So that the next generation could say wow as they stood under a thousand year old giant tree.

I was filled with an appreciation for the gift of life all around me. I was touched by the magic of the moment and the love around me, by Nate's joy and gleeful delight, by the support team for making this an unforgettable experience. As I looked over the edge high above the ground, I hoped that Star, as she ascended after me, could convey to her radio listeners worldwide this awesome pilgrimage, this *encounter with the sacred*, this gift of a tree.





Trees
glorify
the earth's
maternal
fruitfulness.

They are
her giant
children.

It is in
the tree
that earth's
deepest
powers
are lifted
highest.

—*Meinrad Craighead*



PLANTING THE MAPLE

Elisavietta Ritchie

Last night I found an uprooted sapling
beside the new house on stilts.
Scruffy, leaves torn, roots dried, but
a maple. I planted it in a barrel of earth,

then remembered Stafford and Merwin
composing one new poem every day,
so I wrote a quatrain about the event.
Modest, but perfect, whatever perfection is.

When I awoke, house, tree and poem were gone.
Best I can do by daylight is design a gazebo
on stilts—we are on a flood plain—
and write about not writing that poem.

After the rain, I go outdoors.
Though this is December, maple
seedlings sprout all over the yard,
sudden, tiny, and perfect.





POEM FOR TREES

Alice Friman

Did you ever notice how trees don't touch
even when dropping pods or flinging seed
or landing them in helicopters like a private joke?
They sense each other's presence, lean away,
grow a limb only where there's room. Leaves

gossip tree to tree, but leaves are young.
In October, young to dying. Out of work,
shiftless, each one a gold watch.
They grab on, ancient mariners—desperate
for time beyond the rake, the plastic bag
twist-tied at the curb.

Only the bald body maintains
a separateness, a fort, a steady tick-tock
through the hundred years of its labors.

What fantasy is it that wishes otherwise?
That underground, the earth is not
just cemetery. That roots inch,
searching like moles, for miles, years.
That maybe in my backyard, the taproot
of the Japanese Maple that grows by the pagoda
of the Great Bonze has found my Sweetgum at last,
and they lie like snakes together, touching
all along each other's length, quiet and breathing.





A man has made at least a start on discovering
the meaning of human life when he plants a
shade tree under which he knows full well he
will never sit.

—*Elton Trueblood*



POEM NO.2

William G. Ward

I saw a tree.
I asked if it was an orange tree.
It said No, Not an Orange.
I asked if it was a lemon.
It said No, Not a Lemon.
I asked if it was pear, peach or persimmon.
It said No, Not Pear, Peach nor Persimmon.
I asked if it was a maple.
It said No, Not a Maple.
Oak?
No.
Poplar?
No. You're Getting Colder.
I asked what kind of tree it was.
It said, Ulmus Procera. I Am Ulmus Procera.
Satisfied, I went home.





REDWOOD TREES



Leslie Siltan

Giants:

breathing the fresh chill air
making room for the enormous sky.

By their presence alone,
they enlarge the space,
send their spirit anchors sailing to the top of the world,
to the bottom of the sea,
holding fast to Jupiter and Mars—
to keep the distance wide and true.

Sentinels of The First World,
Children of The Last Truth,
Giants of The North

express creation
civilized
standing erect
showing The Way

still breathing the chill air
still making room for the enormous sky

and those distant-tossed anchors:
polished by the moon and the sun
gleaming huge
hold fast.

This symphony of giants:
the last of their kind
keep the history of The Brotherhood strong.
They are standing watch yet
within their silence.





There was a handsome mockingbird that sang his heart out every morning during the nesting season... Last week the tree was cut down. The mockingbird and his song are gone. I can't put a dollar value on the tree nor on the mockingbird nor his song. But I know that I—and the whole neighborhood—have suffered a loss. I wouldn't know how to count it in dollars.

—*Jacqueline Hiller*



REFLECTION

Norma Strong

We long to breathe green
in a place where trees
still sway in the wind.

Where spring buds
burst and the air
floats apple scented.





REPLACING FIRE

Renée E. D'Aoust

Forest work is new to me. I often laugh that I traded in leotards, Isadora scarves, and the New York City dance scene for Carhartts, a brush saw, and the forest of northern Idaho. When some of my Manhattan friends send me e-mails, they write comments, such as, "Using a chainsaw? Any forest left after you're done?" or, my favorite, "Shouldn't you just leave it all alone? Let nature act!"

From the perspective of the urban environment, one might think that nature acts alone. However, nature has not been acting on her own for a long time, humans have made significant impacts on western forests. Some of the controversy over what entails sound forest management is, in part, a controversy over the extent to which humans should be involved in the forest at all. As a result of the huge infernos the last few summers, many westerners have become aware of long-standing wildfire suppression policies. While there is a balance between letting wildfires burn and keeping those fires contained, who or what determines that balance? If the forest has never been allowed to burn, then wildfires can be practically impossible to contain and the choice really is made by nature, not man.

After a lightning strike started a ground fire that burned less than two miles south of our home, we decided that we did not want to leave nature-the forest-all alone. My family decided to take active measures to try to decrease the risk of a wildfire on our property. We decided to do some thinning, clearing out woody debris and ladder fuels that help wildfires start or spread. We also made a firebreak around the perimeter of our property and cleared a defensible space around the homesite.

I worried about taking out the wrong tree, thinning too much, picking up too much debris instead of leaving brush to compost naturally and return nutrients to the soil. How did we know we were doing the right thing? What was the right balance?

When I moved to my home in Idaho, leaving New York City, in the summer of 2001, we applied for a hazardous fuels removal grant from the Idaho Department of Lands. The grant included supervisory visits from a forester who gave recommendations about our land. Around here, where so much private property borders the national forest and the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness, which stretches all the way to Canada, the ability of private landowners to help decrease the risk of wildfire is invaluable. Plus, the forest work gave me a transition period after leaving New York City. This transition period was supposed to be one summer, but I've been here two years and I don't know if I'll ever leave. Besides, my Plott hound Truffle needs the woods. So do I.



Tom, our forester, is one of those wise people my mom has the habit of bringing into our lives just when needed. She seems to open herself up somehow, and the person we need appears. Tom is soft-spoken, often placing his hand directly on the tree about which he speaks. Mom does the same thing.

After Tom's first visit to our property, he referenced specific trees and their locations. "You know that pocket of grand firs in the southeast draw," he said, not exactly forming a question so much as making a statement, "I'll take you up there and show you the root rot." After two visits, Tom knew the trees and the lay of our land better than I did after spending summer vacations with my parents for years. Tom probably even knew our forest land better than my mother.

On this day, our small group—Tom, Mom, Dad, me and my hound—climbed the hill farther into the forest. Tom wore bright red suspenders and heavy leather boots. After a short walk, we stood in a clearing. From where we stood, we looked north to the top of Goat's Peak, Bee Top Mountain, and Scotchman's Peak, at 7,009 feet the highest mountain in northern Idaho. Although it was July, there were still pockets of snow on the top of the ridges. The thick forests that border our valley rise almost to the top of these craggy mountains.

I had spent the previous week using my brush saw, some loggers call it a "brush wand," taking out grand fir and hemlock thickets. I built several burn piles, "slash piles," preparing another section of land for planting seedlings. We had studied silviculture systems and decided to plant white pines, ponderosa pines, and western larch: trees that originally inhabited the northern Idaho forest. Trees that are far more resistant to disease and crown fires than grand firs or hemlocks.

But I'd seen how quickly the blade cut through the landscape.

We pushed our way through densely packed evergreens. "You'll want to thin out this dog-hair thicket even more," Tom said.

The dog-hair thickets were often the easiest to cut. They are clumps of tremendously dense, closely packed trees which during a dry period can be extremely flammable. Many of the dog-hair thickets I would simply cut down, taking out the whole thicket, so the area could be replanted.

We had acres to thin. We studied which trees to keep and which ones to take out, leaving 10-12 feet between the ones we thinned. "It's a slow process, thinking before doing," Mom said, "but it's worth it, especially in the forest."

I discovered a lot of good-looking western red cedars: straight boles, good growth, healthy looking trees. With my thinning from below, and potential generations of my family's stewardship, these cedars might someday become an old growth stand. It was exciting to see parts of the forest regenerating itself, particularly replacing itself with cedars—a tree that feels ancient even before fully grown.

"A cedar," Mom always says, "is a tree you go and touch when you really need comfort."



Mother Nature doesn't have a chainsaw, but she does have fire. I have a chainsaw, and I don't want fire. We all agreed that when we're choosing which trees to thin, which to take out, we would imagine ourselves as a substitute for fire. We wanted to do all we can in preparation. Then if fire did come, we'd have a contained ground fire, not a huge crown inferno.

Whenever I work in the woods, I feel an awesome responsibility.

"Remember," Tom reassured me, "Mother Nature doesn't do things wrong."

Well, it is possible for me to think I'm acting on behalf of Mother Nature and still do things wrong. The rhetoric of knowing what is right and what is wrong is used to rationalize all kinds of actions in our forests. But Tom's thought is worth pondering. What he means, in part, is that we can't judge Mother Nature for being right or wrong. Mother Nature often takes radical action. If we aren't blind to our intentions, if we think before doing, it might be possible to steward the land, to benefit Mother Nature.

I tell my friends back east that I've become part of the forest. I feel at home. The feeling of being at home is a sense of being rooted to place. I'm rooted to the smell of trees through all seasons, to the sound of the creek rushing behind my house, to the sense that the mountains will be here long after I'm gone.

Instead of walking through canyons of cement and practicing the contractions of Martha Graham inside dance studios, my hound and I walk outside through a forest that I've thinned and through acres of seedlings I've planted with my own hands. Now I practice a commitment to the one small piece of land that we steward. The one small place on the planet where I can listen and be still. Right here. I'm standing on it now.

Perhaps if we accept that acting on behalf of Mother Nature is truly an awesome responsibility, we won't do things wrong. If she is used to fire, and we don't want fire, perhaps our hand can become the hand of Mother Nature.





The forests are flags of nature.
—*Enos A. Mills*



RISING ABOVE RUINS

Evelyn A. Buretta

I traveled back in time one day
to see my childhood home
with adult eyes.
As I neared the last mile of the lane
I tingled with tiny sparks of apprehension.

I remembered
Dad laying a red brick walk to the cistern,
our endless walks with buckets of rain water,
the lifeline for drinking, cooking, washing—
Mom throwing a catalpa seed there
on the ground behind the house.



I remembered
the farm growing,
cattle herd multiplying,
barn expanding,
sheds going up,
kids tricycling,
chickens laying,
wheat fields waving,
cistern filling up,
garden flourishing,
flowers spreading out,
telephone handles cranking.

In my mind I saw
a skinny tree struggling up near the cistern,
broad leaves fanning out, gasping,
cradling white May flowers—



this catalpa tree reaching up and out,
begging to be recognized,
later, stretching its arms,
becoming chin-up bars for kids,
holding clotheslines to the summer kitchen,
grasping flower buckets,
bearing bird nests.

I recalled
clumps of catalpa leaves offering shade for
chicken neck chopping,
chicken feather plucking,
apple peeling,
bean snapping,
cats napping.



I remembered
seasons for harvesting,
icy pond for skating,
electricity coming,
the outhouse closing,
indoor plumbing beginning,
telephone dials whirling,
high school kids graduating.

I remembered
our family moving on,
new families moving in and out,
hearing about changes, changes, changes—
summer kitchen torn down,
pond dried up,
chicken houses dismantled,
barn burned down,
silo razed.



Now, I arrive
at the house I was born in.
A house still lived in
but so much worn-out.
Landmarks obscure, distorted, faded and blown away.
That blackened concrete foundation?
Could not have been the barn—
now pressing up so much closer
to the house than I recalled.
Cow trough discarded.
Machinery sheds gone.
Gardens untilled.
Flowers untended and gone to weed.
Forest across the lane, chopped down.



Front yard. Where did it begin and end?
Nothing recognizable.
Changes so drastic
my original memories crumble like old photographs.
I wanted to see my birthplace
the way it used to be.
How cruel to torment me with this nightmare vision!
The farm so laboriously built up
now a desolate, barren wasteland.

Holding back tears and filled with rage,
I walk to the back of the house.
No tidy red brick walk!
No cistern to catch the rain.
Only a cheap, pathetic deck.

Then, I feel it, towering over me.
I behold a giant, ominous tree



with mammoth trunk, enclosed in armor-like bark,
roots like huge claws, erupting from the ground,
leaves big as shields, catching the sunlight,
thick branches, thrusting outward,
twisting and spiraling upward,
up, up,
past the roof of the house—and yet
still climbing higher ... higher.

This tree! This behemoth!
Where did it come from?
An addition to further infuriate me?
How high did it rise?
What power lives at the top?
A vengeful ancient knight?
I tremble at its size and height.



Bewildered, I step forward.
The broad leaves look familiar.
The trunk stands in the exact spot
of that growing catalpa tree
left behind so long ago.

Did a new branch strike out in defiance
with each decline of the farm?
Did bright new green leaves weep softly
with each spring rain's loss?
Did a growing catalpa brave each winter's snow
with dreams of the farm's past glory?

The tree, valiant lone warrior,
battling against all the changes
stood stubborn, steady, strong,



the same, yet changed ... matured.
Like me?

The once meager catalpa tree survived.
No, not just survived—triumphed, conquered,
transcended the decaying world
beneath its spreading branches.

The tree had endured!
Avenged, I laugh.
I feel a sense of justice.
Then,
I salute
the mighty, magnificent catalpa tree!





SADIE'S TREE

Greg Tuleja

In her last years, yielding to a growing preoccupation with the occult, Sadie Barnett became convinced that a certain apple tree on the back edge of her orchard possessed mystical powers. Believing that the tree was a conduit to the next world, Sadie spent many inspirational hours there, slowly pacing around the tree, at times embracing it, as she quietly recited beloved passages from the Bhagavad-Gita and the Upanishads. The tree became the spiritual center of her existence, and on clear summer evenings, fortified by its magical influence, Sadie turned her eyes upward toward the constellations of the Zodiac in an attempt to communicate with departed souls who had crossed over to the other side, dead fiends and relatives who she believed were eager to remain in contact with her. Toward the end of her life, Sadie's obsession with the tree confirmed her reputation as the town's most flamboyant spiritual crackpot, an opinion of distrust shared by her own son and daughter-in-law.

Sadie's persistent supernatural enthusiasm had for some time been an annoyance to her son William, who admitted a sense of relief when his mother finally died at the age of 92. His last deferral to Sadie's spiritual whims was to perform a funeral ceremony that had been meticulously described in her will. As William sprinkled his mother's ashes beneath the apple tree, he chanted mysterious phrases from obscure Eastern texts, as outlined in advance by his mother, and his wife Elizabeth released from a wire cage a single chicken abducted from the henhouse. They had not been able to find "a pure white dove," but William considered this variation from Sadie's written instructions to be insignificant. In late November, in Vermont, they felt lucky to find *any* bird at all. The old woman's final mandate that "my son shall don ram's horns and face the constellation Aries precisely at midnight on the third day after my death, and recite verses 18-23 from the eighth chapter of Leviticus," was executed only loosely. The correct lines from the Bible were read, but William was unable to locate a ram's horn or even to find the proper constellation in the autumn sky, so he merely hooked his fingers behind his ears in a generic bovine simulation, and rotated his body in a complete circle, thus safely covering all celestial quadrants. By this time, William and Elizabeth were bored with the whole thing. They were relieved when the ridiculous ceremony was over. As winter took hold of the farm, the Barnetts happily turned their activities indoors, away from Sadie's tree and its dubious spiritual associations. The funeral service in the orchard was soon forgotten.

The next spring, William and Elizabeth noticed that the tree had produced especially large and fragrant blossoms, and in late summer when the apples were ready for picking, the Barnetts were



impressed by their unusual appearance. They had the rich amber color typical of the Golden Delicious, but the top of each apple was decorated with bright splashes of violet, shaped like delicate plum colored feathers, spreading gently outward from the stems. The Barnetts were puzzled by the exotic color of the apples, but they refused to believe that the unusual fruit had anything to do with William's ram impersonation or the uniquely specialized fertilizer the tree had enjoyed the previous fall. After years of tolerating Sadie's irritating habit of relating almost anything out of the ordinary to some lofty mystical principle, William had acquired a fanatical spiritual skepticism, and was quick to offer a *scientific* explanation for the strangely colored apples.

"Not much snow last winter, and May was cool. I'm sure it's just a variation due to the weather. "

Elizabeth thought back on the previous six months and recalled a perfectly normal amount of snow for their part of Vermont, and a spring no warmer or cooler than any other she could remember. But she did not mention this to her husband. If he chose to deny the possibility that his mother had exerted some posthumous influence on this extravagant harvest from her favorite tree, let him. Sadie's eccentricity had worn him down during her life, and now that she was dead, he should not be blamed if he lacked the generosity to give her some credit, even as a source of agricultural nutrient.

Following a long-standing tradition, their friend Mabel Wilson was given the first apples of the season, so that she could bake a pie for her great aunt Millie, an invalid whose primary diversion from her isolated housebound existence was the greedy sampling of selected produce accepted from the gardens of her neighbors. The superiority of the Barnetts' apples was widely appreciated, and after waiting through a long summer of ripening, Aunt Millie anticipated with enthusiasm the arrival of her niece, delivering "the first Barnett pie." In early September, Mabel arrived at the orchard, where William had set aside a basket of apples picked from Sadie's tree.

"They're kind of a funny color, aren't they?" asked Mrs. Wilson.

"It's the weather this year, that's all," replied William. "What weather?"

William hesitated. "Well, the light snow, Mabel."

"Light! Bill, we had plenty of snow last winter. About average, I'd say. Elizabeth, has he been getting enough rest?"

"Mabel, it's just some variation in the coloring, that's all. Pretty, aren't they?" replied Elizabeth.

"As you well know, Elizabeth, apples should be judged by taste, not looks. I'll let you know what Millie thinks."

The next day Mabel Wilson returned, carrying the basket of apples. "I'm not going to be using these apples for Millie's pie."



"Well, why not, Mabel?"

"I have a feeling you know damn well why not, Bill. I was getting ready to bake, and I sat down on the porch to rest a bit. I ate one of your funny looking apples."

"So?"

"Well, you must know what I'm talking about."

"Mabel, I'm sure I don't," said William.

"Well, I had some...visions."

"Visions? What do you mean, visions?"

"Well, I don't know exactly. It's not easy to explain. I can't say it was unpleasant. On the contrary. But I don't think I should do it again. Something about it just doesn't seem right. But I'll tell you one thing. You've got some mighty special apples there."

"Oh, come on, Mabel," said Elizabeth. "You've been wearing out those steps down to the wine cellar again. That's all that's wrong with you."

"You think what you want, Elizabeth Barnett, but I know what I know. I'm returning the apples and that's that. I'll ask George Thomas to give me some *peaches* for Millie's pie. I'll be safe with him. George would never grow anything with these...*qualities*. And my advice to you is to be careful who you give those apples to."

Although a more cautious student of the unknown than Sadie, her former colleague in mystical research, Mabel maintained a steadfast curiosity in the unexplained mysteries of the universe. The Barnetts considered her to be prone to exaggeration when it came to supernatural matters, and were sharply skeptical about her account of the magic apples. Still, Mabel's story was too spectacular to be ignored. That evening, William was determined to put it to the test.

"She was *my* mother, and it was *her* tree, so I think I should be the one to try it first. Not that anything is going to happen."

"Bill, I don't like this at all. Mabel said *visions*, whatever *that* means. I'm not sure you *want* any visions. Do you? I'm sure I don't."

"Elizabeth, I'm not going to have any visions. I just want to put the whole silly idea to rest, that's all. I'll stand right here, eat an apple, and that will be the end of it. We can't really trust Mabel's judgment on this. I wouldn't call her the most reliable person."

Bill Barnett took a bite. And another. He ate quickly and tossed the core into the trash.

"You see? Nothing."

As they sat down together on the couch a strange look came over William's face and he smiled faintly. A distance gently rose in his eyes, as if he was listening to the sweet music of a remote orchestra, drifting into the house on the summer wind from some invisible, enchanted bandstand.



"Well, this is wonderful! I guess Mabel was right after all. These apples *are* special. Don't worry, Elizabeth. Everything will be fine. I'll be back. Don't worry." He leaned toward his wife as if to kiss her, but as their faces met he had already begun to dissolve into a kind of bluish gray smoke, and she passed right through him. Elizabeth stood up and took a few steps backward, staring at her husband, or what was left of him. The swirl of smoke slipped through an open window into the cool night air. It rose into the sky, where it dissipated into tiny flakes of light, joining distant constellations high overhead. She gazed up at the glistening specks of silver that she was convinced had once been her husband, but they soon became indistinguishable from the other stars. He was gone.

"I'll be damned if I'm going to stay here and wait," Elizabeth said to herself.

She hurried inside and quickly ate one of the apples. As she too dissolved into the air, she smiled and softly whispered, "This is lovely."

Some time later they found themselves seated together on the couch, feeling dizzy and disoriented, but fully satisfied.

"My God, Bill. You disappeared! Where did you go?" Elizabeth paused, remembering that she too had eaten one of the apples and had also been away somewhere. "Come to think of it, where did *I* go?"

"I don't know, Elizabeth." A smile seemed fastened to William's face. "I suppose it was heaven. I remember looking down on everything from so high up. It was all so beautiful. And I spoke to my mother! It was the first civil conversation we've had in years."

"I did too, Bill! I spoke to Sadie, too. She asked me how I liked the apples."

"Elizabeth, I think I saw the future. That's what it must have been. I think that we must be going to Europe. Did you see? I'm going to take a teaching job in England. I saw us having lunch in a pub that Charles Dickens *himself* had visited. We drank luscious dark beer and watched the snowfall outside the window. Elizabeth, we've always wanted to travel to Europe. Did you see it?"

"Yes, I saw it too, Bill. Chartres Cathedral. I can't believe that we finally went. A choir was rehearsing as we walked inside. It was magnificent, wasn't it? My God, Bill, it has to be the apples. It's just like Mabel said. It's visions, or time travel, or something. Something wonderful!"

Over the next week, the Barnetts took full advantage of their newly discovered ability to travel forward in time, and the apples from Sadie's tree provided them each night with stunning glimpses of their upcoming good fortune. They came to expect from their "apple trips" as they called them, one delightful image after another, and they succumbed happily to the temptation to indulge themselves, night after night, in this magical recreation. On one trip, they were proud to witness their son's college graduation, still several years away. On another, they found themselves searching in the attic for a wooden sea chest that had belonged to William's grandfather. In it they found a signed first edition of Sir Arthur



Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*, which they sold to an especially eager private collector for a spectacular sum of money. In the dream they saw that the proceeds from the sale would make possible the purchase of a small cottage on the coast of Maine, thus fulfilling a cherished hope for their retirement.

Not all of the scenes viewed by the Barnetts were as momentous as an unexpected windfall or a long awaited European vacation. The apples also provided them with simpler, more routine glimpses of the future—a quiet stroll at sunset, a day trip to Burlington, a barbecue with friends to whom they had not yet been introduced. The visions were vivid, shining with clarity, but each night after their return, their memories promptly failed them, and the Barnetts had only a few short minutes to engage in a frantic review of what they had just seen. Specific events were quickly forgotten, but there lingered through the evening and into the next day a profound sense of comfort and excitement, the belief that wonderful things were in store for them, even if they could not remember the details. Sadie was often present in the dreams, giving encouragement and guidance, with a warmth and an interest that, from the Barnetts' point of view, had been lacking during her life. On the fifth night, after enjoying their customary apple after dinner, they experienced in advance the marriage of their daughter Janet, a senior at college.

"Bill, I saw Janet's wedding! She was so happy. We danced to the music of a string quartet, and we all drank mimosas from crystal wineglasses. Bill Jr. gave a beautiful toast. Oh, it was all so lovely. Except for the bridesmaids. Bill, they were dressed in the most revolting shade of green. Awful. But Janet wore a gorgeous white gown, and the groom was so handsome, and from what I heard, quite wealthy. Bill, she was so happy."

William Barnett looked down at the floor, listening indifferently to his wife's ecstatic report. "What's the matter, Bill? Didn't you see the wedding too?"

"Yes, I saw it."

"Well, what's wrong? Did you see something else?"

"Yes. Something else."

It had not occurred to the Barnetts, after almost a week of the most pleasant and intoxicating peeks into the future, that anything dark or threatening might be revealed to them. But Bill's experience that night was different. What he saw was ominous and terrifying, and in one grand and sudden gesture, the pleasures of the apple trips were ruined. Like his wife, Bill had heard the string quartet and he had tasted the mimosas. But he had also seen his daughter and his new son-in-law seated in an airplane that crashed into an icy mountain somewhere in Colorado. Bill could not find the words to describe this devastating news to his wife, and he was relieved when the frightening images started to fade.



"I don't remember it all, Elizabeth. It's getting fuzzy."

"Come on, Bill. What was it? Tell me!"

"I really can't remember. But it wasn't good. It wasn't good."

"Tell me, Bill. Is it the children? Is something bad going to happen? Is that it?"

"I'm not sure, Elizabeth. I can't remember."

Bill did forget about the plane crash, but the realization that something terrible had occurred (or more precisely, *would* occur) was a heavy burden. The Barnetts agreed that there should be no more excursions into the future, and they resolved to eat no more of Sadie's apples. But they were still fascinated by the tree, and they could not resist walking together in the orchard night after night to stand silently before it, staring with wonder and desire at the beautiful gold and purple apples. They persuaded themselves that Sadie's voice could be heard rustling through the leaves of the orchard at night, calling out to them, exhorting them to once again cross over and join her. The Barnetts felt themselves being drawn closer and closer to another experiment with the apples. But they were convinced that this would be a grave mistake.

"Bill, we've got to get rid of that tree. There's something about all of this that isn't natural. Mabel said it, too. It's just not right."

William agreed. "I know. My mother might have relished some contact with the next life, but it doesn't suit me a bit. I wish we had put her ashes somewhere else. Out to sea. Or up on some mountain. Not so close."

"Well, we can't help that now, Bill. Let's just get rid of the tree."

The urge to eat the apples was still strong, and the magnetic presence of the tree still powerful, and it took all the determination they could muster to do the job. Early one morning, taking turns with the chain saw, they felled the tree and cut it up into lengths of firewood, which they stacked neatly behind the barn. But fearing some unknown supernatural vengeance, William and Elizabeth resolved never to burn the wood. The stack of wood remained there, untouched and out of sight and the apples from Sadie's tree were left to rot on the ground.

Within a week of cutting down the tree, the Barnett's vague memory of their astral travels faded completely, and all recollection of future events, good and bad, vanished. When they passed the small clearing with the stump of Sadie's tree, William and Elizabeth were not reminded of their adventures with the apples or even of the funeral service from the year before. They had forgotten all of it.

The events they had seen while under the influence of the apples did eventually come to pass, but they did not realize that they were enjoying them for a second time. Bill's appointment to a one-year



teaching position in Salisbury, England, came as a complete surprise to him, and their trip to London for the Christmas holiday provided the couple with the robust adventure of crawling from pub to pub, including one that had been a favorite of Charles Dickens. Never having traveled to England before, the tavern was naturally quite unfamiliar to them. And the discovery in the attic of the valuable book by Arthur Conan Doyle was likewise experienced with the freshness and excitement of the moment, completely free from any shadow of prescience, untainted by any suspicion that it had happened before.





Today I have grown taller from walking with the trees.
—*Karle Wilson Baker*



SEMPERVIRENS

Maria Melendez

By the time the creek receded all the way back into its bed, the college marching band had pulled so many Louisiana reds out of their instruments that the drum major took to roasting them on a portable barbeque during practice. He ate so many crawdads one afternoon that his scalp started to feel chitinous-brittle and curved, like there might be a little stringy white meat stuck to the underside. The world had been drying out since last week, when an upstream dam broke and flooded out the channel of slow green water that wound through campus. A surging stew of spicy pine limbs, mud, algae and aquatic creatures had poured onto the floor of the music building. Across the other bank, it had swirled around the trunks of the largest coast redwood grove in the Central Valley, the pride of the campus arboretum.

When Augie Vaca, the redwood grove's caretaker, came to see how the grove had fared, he thought he saw some flood debris caught in the branches of one of the young thirty-footers. But when he walked up to the trunk he realized that the brown limbs hanging at an odd vertical, and the damp tangle above them, weren't debris, they were the torso of a man. Augie hollered in surprise and stumbled halfway across the bridge to wave at the drum major, who was standing in front of the music building. The drum major crossed the creek to follow Augie's silently pointing hand. The man he saw in the tree was so beautiful, with slender, ropey arms and dark hair pressed down his neck and sinewy back, that the drum major's legs dissolved and he fell into a cold faint in one of the grove's perpetual mud puddles.

Augie ran to get Mercedes, the superintendent of the campus arboretum, who was nibbling a two-day-old coffee cake in the break room of the arboretum HQ building. Augie took her down to the redwood grove. They both scouted the man, or rather the man's torso, from every possible angle on the ground. The nearly almond-shaped eyes, pale as weedy morning glories, and the deep reddish tone of his skin left the impression of generations of racial hybridization. A crooked needle nose gave a scary, mesmerizing asymmetry to his lightly wrinkled face. His lean arms drooped past his waist, which appeared to be grafted to the trunk of the redwood. The drum major had regained consciousness and stood beneath the tree with mud and dried needles stuck all over the rear of his uniform. The three of them raked their eyes over the man's torso so thoroughly that they managed to dull the sharp bit of surprise that had first cut them silent. They tried speaking to him, and he tilted his head down toward them, answering in a string of sounds with a strong foothills lilt that none of them could



understand. Thus they skipped over (gift or curse, it was long to be debated by the philosophy department) his lower trunk and concluded, feeling very liberal and open-minded, that he was a homeless man. Maybe a bike thief or a crazy hobo. But when they brought over the arboretum's resident crazy lady, who knew everything about freakishness in nature, all she needed was one look to make an accurate identification. "Wood spirit," she chortled. Augie saw by her gestures that she meant he had come in the form of a man after the dam broke, to show by example how to live as one with the world. The lady explained, through an elaborate charade, that he had intended to graft into a venerable old valley oak, but the force of the flood currents threw him against this misfit redwood before he even knew how to use his eyes or hands. She intimated that he was probably still disoriented, and cranky from over-watering.

The following day everyone knew that half of a living man was stuck to the top of a tree in Augie's grove. Against the advice of the crazy lady, for whom wood spirits in human form were trouble's own entourage (she'd seen a few in Laos), Augie hadn't felled the tree. All through the night, as barn owls screeched and hidden sprinklers faithfully soaked the already saturated redwood grove, the college administration had debated the issues raised by the torso trunk configuration. Treeman or mantree? Did he have amber blood? If so, could it be patented when proven to cure the common cold if chewed in coagulated form? Was he ecto-this or endo-that? Which department, which experts who had authority here? On they theorized until they walked out in the thin blue light of predawn to find half the town standing in a circle beneath the treeman, some sitting in meditation, presumably tapping into Oneness. A group of volunteers from the homeless shelter trying to toss up apples, stale cake, a toothbrush and soap. The treeman appeared to nod in and out of sleep, and made no effort to lift his arms.

Professor Mills, dean of the forestry school, arrived at seven, graduate student lackey in tow to help him secure the name of this new dendritic variety: *Sequoia sempervirens ssp. homo, d. mills*. Throughout the chilly morning, town officials, scholars of multiple -ologies from myth to path-, along with redwood experts from around the state, began arriving. A number of home school mothers brought their children out to the arboretum. The children whispered to each other that the half-man must've been an awful sinner to have God plaster him, naked and cold, to a tree. A bearded creation theologian from Berkeley concluded that the man was suffering to absolve our collective eco-evil. The National Guard commander wondered if the treeman knew that a better strategic position could've been achieved in a waterproof camo jacket.

A swell of interest in the treeman over the next few months gave Mercedes the idea to charge a hefty permit fee for anyone who wanted to spend more than half a day beneath him. She was hoping



to raise money to re-convert the creekside back to a cottonwood and wild-grape ridden riparian zone, a visionary landscape she frequently referred to as "native." Then came publications, conferences, and plans for a peer-juried, interdisciplinary Treeman Studies journal. But as the year wore on, the treeman's inability or refusal to speak English, Latin, or any discipline's lingua franca, and the moratorium placed by the Human Subjects Research Ethics Committee on sawing or scalpeling him in any way, began to evaporate the scientists' fervor to root out the nature of the treeman. By the time August came, with its heat like an affliction, even the deep ecologists and nature poets were tired of the treeman's perennially sullen face. Why couldn't he do a better job at effusing his bliss, or at the very least at being satisfied with his place in nature?

Waning institutional attention was the least of the treeman's troubles, as he also had lovers. The drum major would trail into the grove at night, sometimes rat-a-tat-tatting on a little snare, sometimes throwing up high piccolo notes like pebbles aimed at the man's heart. In each after-music silence, the drum major strained so hard to hear some murmur of love from above that he developed chronic, pounding earaches. One afternoon he overheard Augie say, during a public tour of the redwood grove, that the Porno use tinctures of boiled redwood foliage to cure ear ailments. Under cover of a silky night fog, the drum major borrowed spikes and a harness belt from his neighbor who worked for the phone company and climbed up the treeman's trunk with plastic baggies and a new pair of tweezers in his pocket. With one arm wrapped around the treeman's ribcage, hips slung back in the harness, he harvested samples of downy chest hair, eyebrows, forearm hair, armpit hair. When he maneuvered the tweezers up to pluck an eyelash, the treeman curled his mouth into such a wilting grimace that the drum major grasped the hot face between his hands and kissed the wood-rough lips. The touch of the treeman's hand on the small of his back startled the drum major so much that he arched forward and nearly slid out of his harness. His spikes started to furrow loose in the bark and he had to claw his way back up the treeman's arms, now slack again, to get high enough to kick in a good foothold. He'd dropped the tweezers in the scramble, and so had to try and pluck those grainy lashes by hand. As he forced one of the treeman's eyes open with a thumb and forefinger, the pale morning glory blue of those folds, clenched around an impossible black seed, made him mortally afraid for his soul.

Mercedes took to visiting the treeman early in the morning, before joggers began to invade the arboretum. She told him stories of her thorny childhood, chewing tenderly on strings of his splintery bark. She never climbed up, naturally obsessed with the size of his ever-growing trunk. She'd bring a tape measure on the first of every month, and penciled numbers like dirty words into a Diameter at Breast Height chart. The treeman remained drooping and silent. One day, in a fit of distraction and desperation, Mercedes smacked her computer screen in the middle of proofing a major grant proposal, walked out to the toolshed and grabbed an old thirteen-inch camp ax.



When Augie found the superintendent an hour later in the grove, she still hadn't sliced the treeman's heartwood, but she kept on hacking through the deep, soft outer bark, muttering "give me, give me, give me" with each stroke.

Following Augie's promotion to arboretum superintendent, his first executive act was to order his interns to massage the treeman's shoulders and neck every other day, to stimulate circulation in the xeric limbs. After a few months of this treatment, the treeman finally began to show an interest in the aesthetics of his own poses. He practiced bending his arms up at various angles according to the tilt and flow of sunlight in the grove. The bald spot on top of his head sprouted a bright green patch of cheerful moss. A year after the flood of crawdads and debris, it seemed like the treeman was becoming a healthier mantree. He was even attempting speech, so Augie stuffed fistfuls of powdered Miracle Grow in the treeman's mouth to promote speedy language development.

But before the treeman could advance beyond "oh" and "ah," the campus planning commission called for the removal of the entire redwood grove to clear space for an ecological restoration effort. Mercedes' dream to replant the creek banks with native plants had established itself firmly in the hearts of campus environmental idealists. After all the care and attention he'd given to its survival, Augie worried that the death of the mantree might feel like the end of the three dimensional world. But he also remembered that felled redwoods sprout clones every year from their rotting stumps. On the afternoon that chainsaws mowed down the miraculous present to make room for the imagined past, he knew an unpredictable crop would come up with next year's rains.





SHADE

Margarita Engle

When we moved down into this valley of heat
leaving the gentle climate of our tree-clad hillside home

at first I was greedy, instinctively hoarding the shade
of a huge eucalyptus tree across the street

with its roots in our neighbor's soil, and a portion of afternoon shade
on the dusty shoulder of our side of the road

now I'm learning to share, no longer surprised by strangers sleeping
in the cabs of their pickups, and workers stopping to eat sack lunches

wayfarers of all sorts make themselves at home in front of our window
the big tree's shade an intangible treasure, too airy and rare to be owned.





Knowing trees, I understand the meaning of patience.
—*Hal Borland*



SHE DREAMS OF TREES

Deborah Gordon Cooper



In the front of the house
there are two tall pines,
twice as high as the rooftop.
They are like guardians,
keeping every kind of danger out.
The day the two men come
to cut one down,
because its roots
have wrecked the plumbing,
she and her mother start to cry.
It surprises her then,
the way that you can
love a tree.

There is only one tree
she is afraid of,
the giant tree on the way
home from school.
This is a tree that waits to
reach down and grab children,
these children, never seen again.
She runs as quickly as she can.
Her brother,
the one who told her the story,
stands laughing underneath the tree
until she cries.



In the backyard
of the new house,
there is an old oak tree
that loves her,
waving with one-thousand hands
when she walks out the door.
This tree does not like boys.
She loves to lean against its trunk,
collecting acorns
for the squirrels she tames.

At night,
through the screen,
she hears the trees
whisper to each other,
believes the trees dream
of the stars.





SHELTERING PEACH TREE

Linda Hofer Waldron

How does a too tall, lanky, five year old girl, prone to clumsiness, spend her time? She chose the smooth bark of a seedling peach tree for a retreat from the Southwest Kansas blazing sun and ever-present wind. Overflowing with the faith that only a child could have that one day it would bare luscious, delicious, juicy peaches—I sat on my favorite branch which provided me a lookout on neighborhood activities. This small rather sparse tree, only a stone's throw from the small two-bedroom house where I lived with my two brothers, mother and stepfather, was my refuge.

I preferred the little tree with the smooth bark instead of the over-powering elm trees with their rough bark and limbs so high. Only my brother, Jack (eight years older) and his friends clad in their heavy jeans dared to climb these trees, to lasso a tree-swing for the most daring to play *Tarzan*. Trees in Dodge City, Kansas were scarce and usually bent by the wind. The long horizontal branch of the little tree would bring a welcome relief from the summer sun in the semi-arid climate. Sometimes my younger brother, David or the neighborhood kids, would join me and practice hanging from their knees like monkeys. This was the closest thing we had to a jungle gym. The grade school playground was over a mile away.

When I was alone, I straddled the limb and rode the most magnificent racehorse with the foliage providing a mane and a tail that stretched out in the wind. Sometimes I would have a conversation with one of the mysterious suitors of Brenda Starr or I would rip out the latest Betty Hutton song "You Can't Get a Man with a Gun" as I imitated her starring role in *Annie Get Your Gun*. Sometimes I had a twig between two fingers or in my mouth to imitate my Mother or Doris Day as sophisticated smokers with conversations rolling off my tongue. Meanwhile, I kept a vigilant lookout to make sure no one caught me talking to myself.

My dream world was shattered when my stepfather yelled "Daubert get in here to eat." The nickname my father chose was Daubert (a large clumsy baseball player, according to my stepfather, who could not hit a baseball as big as a beach ball and if he did he would not be able to make it around the bases without tripping over his own feet). Matilda was the name my Mother chose. I did not think that was nice since the stuffed Matilda dolls were usually ugly. I would silently slink down in my chair at the kitchen table where I had to sit until I finished everything on my plate. The Chow Mein that my Mother made in a pressure cooker, with celery turned to green slime, had to be washed down with milk.



I noticed the sap pouring out of the little peach tree from the bores, but I didn't notice my confidence and self-esteem draining as my dysfunctional family belittled me. I didn't know how desperately the tree needed water and nourishment or how desperately I needed support, love and encouragement from my parents.

The confinement of school where most of the girls were a full head shorter than me and me dressed in hand-me-down clothes gave sharp-tongued teachers a target to embarrass and degrade me. To make matters worse my stepfather sold shoes and because I had feet flat as pancakes, he made me wear old women lace up shoes instead of the popular penny loafers of the 40s and 50s.

When the screaming and yelling between my mother and stepfather became too intense, I curled up in the tree and went into my dream world. But in the winter when the family was confined to the small house, my parents would escape with alcohol and we children became more vulnerable to their critical tongues and anger. When they passed out we experienced sheer terror not knowing what to do next. I hoped for the blissful promise of summer days and dandelions and the cotton blowing off the cottonwood trees and the occasional trip to the sand pit to pick sand hill plums off thorny bushes to make jelly. And, the refuge of the peach tree.

Occasionally, the tree flowered and brought forth a rock hard peach or two that remained hard until it finally fell to the ground. I had hoped it would bring forth a juicy fresh peach instead of the slimy canned peaches my Mother bought at the grocery store. I had never seen an orchard, except in the movies which provided a relief from the day in day out constant fear of the next hateful comment.

Children are amazingly resilient. With the advent of summer, David and I would cajole our parents into staying up late. We always looked forward to an occasional picnic and the trips to Mammaw's and Pappaw's home in Kiowa, Kansas. Those were the best summers.

The "useless peach tree" according to everyone but *me*, was cut down when I was older. I did not cry. By then I had learned how to stuff my feelings. As I grow in womanhood, I have occasional thoughts of my childhood home, the family pets, fond memories of the little sheltering peach tree and gratitude for the peaceful memories of summer days gone by.





Thank God, they cannot cut down the clouds!
—*Henry David Thoreau*



SNAG TREE

Claudia Van Gerven

I have stumbled upon them
in ceaseless embrace,
this long fallen tree
and the earth, her lover.

She seems to lift herself
slowly on one palm, her elbow
bent, the hinge between them.
Her belly, her legs plait inexorably

with his sandy thighs.
Only the dark velvet flesh
of her torso rises above
the gravity of his yearning.

Perhaps she pulls away
from his cold craving,
Perhaps she willingly folds
her collapsing ribs

against his hard furred chest.
Does she resist the touch
of such lively, twitching skin
or does she succumb

to her own dark love
of being taken in?





SOUVENIRS

Daniel Williams

People hobbling down the trail
Of the newly toppled sequoia
Pockets filled with cones
Souvenirs of an eco-event

Each cone holds 500 to 2000
Tomorrows for the dying trees
Oatmeal seeds that will never find
Their way back to this soil

Each cone a salmon flopping
In the creel—a small brown fish
Prevented from obeying its nature
By cruel barbs—grasping hands

Tall trees dreaming ancient dreams
On coffee tables—bookshelves
Caught in tiny finned kernels
Sterile of cotyledon

Dry as dust from corncob wombs
Thousands of sequoia germs ripped
Untimely from the diurnal round
Of things





We must protect the forests for our children, grandchildren and children yet to be born. We must protect the forests for those who can't speak for themselves such as the birds, animals, fish and trees.

—*Chief Edward Moody, Qwatsinas, Nuxalk Nation*



STAY IN THE YARD

Jamie L. Thrush

"Stay in the yard!"
I heard Mom call.
The old screen door squeaked shut on her words.

I stood on the sun baked concrete steps,
Smoothed my homemade sailor suit and wondered...

Stay in the yard.
Stay in the yard?
When the blue sky harbored a steady breeze?
And my boat rocked gently while tied to the dock.
While my heart pumped salty bay water through my veins



Calling me...calling me...
Out of the yard.

The mast swayed as I climbed aboard
And freed my boat from its mooring.
The green sail fluttered in the summer breeze
Taking me out of the yard.

I sailed the high seas
A few hours or more
While the wind whipped
My salt stiffened hair.

The sun turned
My cheeks warm pink
As I raced sailors around
Bobbing buoys,



"Ahoy there mateys!
Move out of the way,
Make way for the SS Sunray!"

Then a voice from behind me
Called, "Jamie...come in for lunch...
Jaaamee...come down from that tree and come in to eat!"

So I brought my boat in, tied it firmly to the dock
And I jumped to the ground from the lowest tree branch.

Stay in the yard, Mom, stay in the yard?
When the blue sky harbors a steady breeze
And my boat rocks gently waiting for me at the dock?

Not while the leafy sail flutters in the breeze
Not until the bay and ocean disappear
Not while my boat is moored
In the yard.





STOP AND SMELL THE ROSES

Jackie Hofer

You may have heard about someone with a close brush with death who, through some act of fate, gets another chance at life. One of the lessons learned from such encounters is the advice to “Take time to stop, and smell the roses.” The person realizes there is much more to life that he or she has been missing.

This story has to do with smelling the roses without the close call with death. A friend from Georgia came out for a visit. I decided to take him fishing. Fly fishing in the beautiful freestone streams of the Colorado Rocky Mountains had become my passion four years earlier. I have one special spot where I only take a member of my family or in this one instance my visiting friend. We left early in the morning as it takes about an hour to reach the highway turnout. After outfitting him with a fishing hat, vest and fly rod, we started up the slope to my special spot. It had rained lightly during the night, so the air was moist, the sky was a sunny, deep blue with a scattering of brilliant, snow white clouds. The dew-lauded wildflowers were in their glory. After a half-hour hike up the slightly rugged trail, we came into the pristine meadow with a shallow pool behind a log dam. The pool is about 50 feet across with a lush swath of grass on the far side, and then a heavy forest of pine trees. On our fishing side, it is rather rocky with windswept, gnarled trees scattered here-and-there amongst the rocks.

I showed my friend how to roll-cast, one of the basic fly casting techniques for a beginner. When roll-casting, you are not going for distance or any fancy back-casting like you see on the television fishing shows. The roll-cast allows you to get the fly line out about 15-25 feet by a quick, smooth movement using your forearm as a power lever. We fished for about an hour. Then we had to leave to get him to Denver International Airport to catch an afternoon flight home. I caught and released two trout. My friend did not catch any fish although he enjoyed the calm and beauty of the meadow. He was a fast learner and his roll-cast looked pretty good by the time we had to leave.

On the way down the trail, I spotted a bent pine tree pointing to some wild rose bushes. I plucked a couple of roses and gave them to my friend. He smelled them—literally swooning at their deliciously sensual scent—and kept sniffing them every few steps. All the way back to the car, he had that somewhat silly smile that a lover has for his new found love. I remarked that he looked like a little boy who



had just found a wonderful treasure. During the drive back, he kept smelling the roses and even sprinkled them with some water from his drinking bottle to keep them fresh. When we arrived at the house, we put the roses and a bit of water in a small, plastic ziplock bag so he could take them to his wife.

The simple sensual pleasures of that special morning will be long remembered. I thank that bent pine tree for reminding us to *stop and smell the roses*.





Going to the woods is going home.
—*John Muir*



SUGAR MAPLE BLUES

Sandra Marek Behringer

Swaying in October's wind, toes
tangled in the earth, my wings shake
when I try to fly, but the light
only breaks into patterns that lie
on the ground around me
like fallen birds.

Listen. Never again amber and
russet leaves whispering this word,
never again branches bending in these
arched ecstasies, dividing the light
into just these dreams.

Look at me, you
who listen to my keening,
and be a little sad.
Next year, if you're here,
You'll be different, too.





TALE OF TWO TREES

Phillis Gershator

Ripe tropic almonds
drop like rocks
or gunshots
on the porch
Too noisy
our neighbor complains

Nuts fall on his tin roof
keeping him up
and on the alert
for prowlers, thieves
Cut the tree down he says



It's an ancient tree, a landmark
home of birds and bats
and cutting is costly
and the bats might punish us
fly into our house
Obeah bats

The flamboyant tree
bothers no one
branches reaching out
umbrella-like
mimosa leaves, vermilion flowers
until it falls in a rain storm
shallow roots upturned
branches crashing across that tin roof
iron gate, telephone lines
trapping people inside



Rescue squad
tree cutter
insurance man
talk of life and limb
but the almond
with one less tree in the yard
its fruits still small and green
gets another chance

On moonlit nights
I hear the bats in the leaves





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THE BIRCH TREE

Joanne Seltzer

Ancient mountains
grew weary of my humanity,
induced me to make love to a birch tree.

It was an act without commitment
yet I put up with the peeling skin
that other women find repulsive.

I begged, then, for absolution
from the sin of the greenhouse effect
and the transgression of acid rain.

However personified, a tree
remains the tortuous symbol of
the cross and immortality.

Though trees can sing, mine became silent.





THE BLUE SPRUCE

From: "Photographs of a Murdered Son"

Kathleen Cain

My father plants a Colorado Blue Spruce
in the yard for you. Each grandchild has a tree.
At three, Meredith could pick hers out
from the line of Austrian pines
that soften the sound of tires
pounding the highway side of the place.
You wouldn't know Meredith, born
after you were killed, just a month before
your own daughter, Taylor.
Cousins, one way or another.



Anyway, your tree...the leader broke off
in a storm. Bad omen I thought
but didn't tell my father—but your "Graco's"
not one to give in to imperfection.
He tore an old green sheet in two, cut pieces
from some lath he'd hoarded in the shed,
made a splint for your honor tree.

That tree gulped life inside itself
for a few months before it figured out
it had someplace to go. Stretched up and up.
Unlike you, cut down, "immediately
lethal," the coroner said, the way
the bullet struck. Great tree of a boy
six-feet-ten-and-a-half inches
at the last measure—look how it takes
a whole line to write out the length of you.



Two years ago, the leader went six inches
past a yardstick planted beside it
in one of the pictures my father sends.
Last summer the tree reached my shoulder.
At the Christmas visit it was the first and only
green creature I saw out the window
from the bedroom where I slept. Any time
I can close my eyes and see it growing
there, on up past my father,
probably even me—up out of your memory.





THE FOREST

Alice Ahrens Williams

He speaks with sadness about the adelgid infestation, white powder on the branches of his dying hemlocks. In his funeral voice, he tells me it's too late to control; the spread is vast. Summers as a barefoot

youth, he roamed these ancient animal paths in their cool and secret dark. Now, he has grown old among them, brothers of wood and bough. Yearly, more sunlight filters into the forest between fallen



evergreens, subtly altering what grows there. Even wild columbine is scarce beneath the creaking leaners. A few chicken mushroom still grow on the old, black wolf tree, and on dead logs strewn

on the forest floor. Carefully he harvests, leaving most, moves nothing unless it's necessary—not a wild flower cut nor a branch turned I go my own way of poems and paints, mourning with him,

writing and framing to keep the trees. Sundays, we walk where the needles are deep beneath our feet. He doesn't talk, but folds his large hand over mine like a soft leaf. At home, he slices into the mushroom's



yellow meat, warming golden butter
in a black iron skillet. We taste the musk
of logs, the soft rain, the sun that dries
the woods; all part of us as we live
among the new green, growing.





THE GROWTH OF FORESTS

Edward J. Rielly

Where the trunk met earth
in heavy roots, the boy found two
that spread apart in distance
equal to the space for sitting.
There he dropped between
and read his books.

Squirrels in scamper from limb
to limb above his head dropped
acorns all about, beside his sides,
beside his feet, beside the pencil
he used to jot in margins words
of wonder from his youthful mind.

Then, while he read and scribbled,
without his noting, all around
a forest grew—trees scratched sky,
shadows fell, needles crept
about his feet. Whiskers stretched,
limbs curled, body portions bulged
or sagged. And still the forest grew.

Through it all the boy grown old
still read and wrote. Words dropped
fitfully, then stopped at last.
He lay back between the roots.
And while he slept, the words
he'd written slid off their pages
to sink into the rich, pine soil

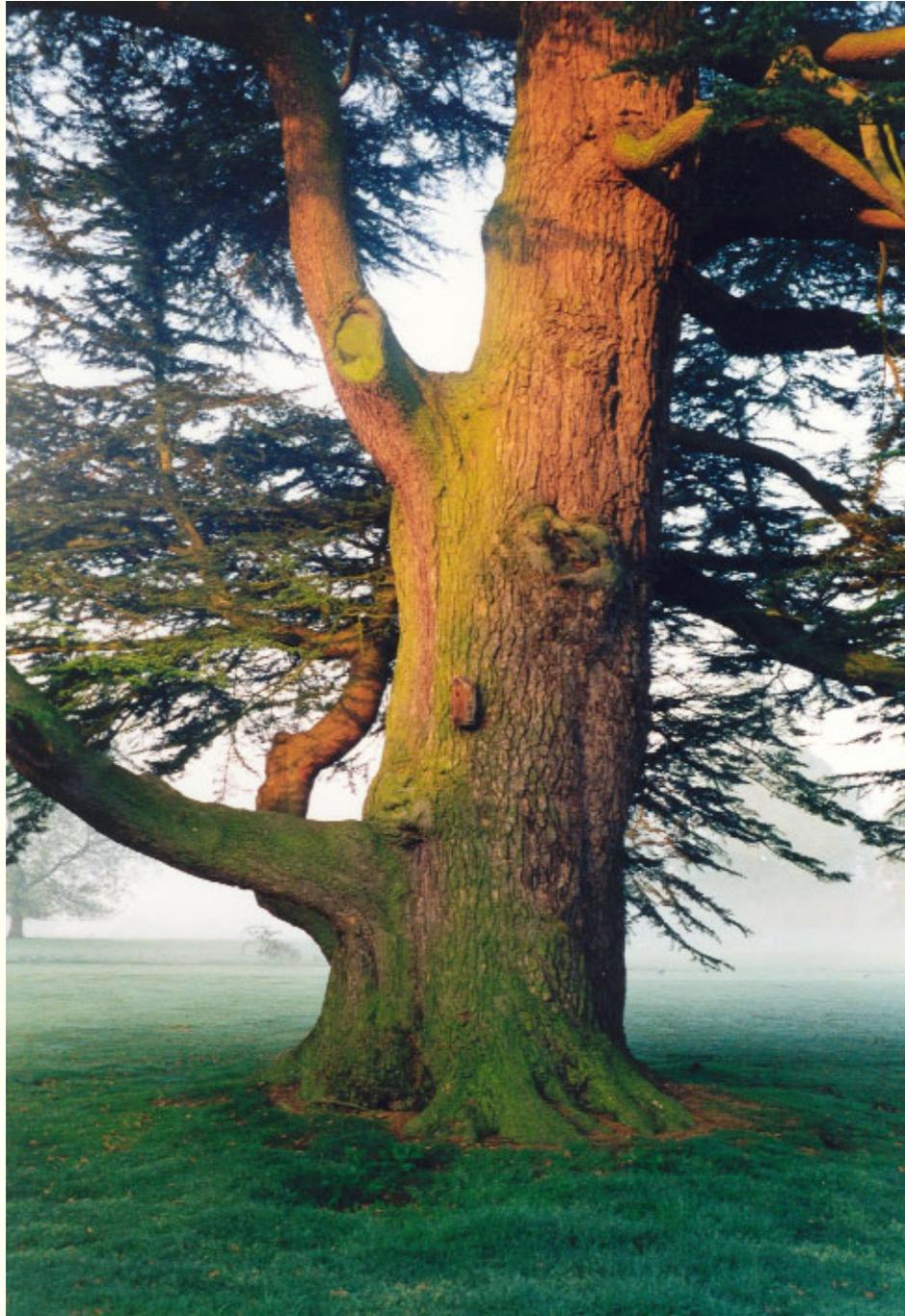




and burst their covers. They grew
in lyrics, they grew in epics.
Some meandered in episodes
that curled about the trunks
of other growths.

Another boy arrived. Hungry,
he plucked a sonnet from a branch
and ate, then flopped upon the grass.
From within his satchel he removed
his books, books of every stripe
and color, and began to read.
All the while that forest grew.





Of all man's works of art, a cathedral is greatest.
A vast and majestic tree is greater than that.
—*Henry Ward Beecher*



THE MAPLES OF DACHAU

Laurie Klein

First, there were songbirds I couldn't
believe, then those photographs—
shins like matchsticks, the embered
eyes. How grateful they were to simply
lie still. In the typhus hut, a survivor wrote,
wooden-spoon men would nest,
safe in the warmth of each other's need.
I thought of a soldier I never
saluted—my father, who never mentioned
war. Who folded our flag as some
tuck an ailing child into bed. Tender as
April. What if my dad was somebody's
hero? From Dachau I take a maple seed,
place it under my pillow. I dream him
young, in uniform, all nose and legs,
walking my way beneath tall trees.





THE MEMORY TREE

Stacy Smith

Last summer, in a park
where the only voices we hear
are always our own and those of
Mother Nature's feathered choir,
after picnicking with my children
'neath the spreading arms
of a multi-tasking
being of God,
I stumbled upon
a reminder of death,
and the celebration of life.

On the grassy carpet, a
man's name and his living years
are frozen in time with a small block
of stone. Behind the stone, a life's
remembered, through another one.

A few years have passed since
this new life was
first rooted into
the peaceful habitat,
where it dwells with
magnificence and splendor.





The living memorial bestows
comfort with its gnarling fingers as
family members gaze at a life that lives
on through the memory tree. The love
that the family members have for
this special person continues to
grow each and every
day as the oxygen
giver reaches for
the wild blue yonder,
toward the life it represents.

As I paused at the
tree, I thought to myself:
I hope someday when it's my
turn to say goodbye, I'll be honored
in the same way—a life remembered
with Mother Nature, whom I'm a big
admirer of. Then, when my future
generations would see the tree,
they would see a
reflection of me
and the memory
tree would bring
some breaths of air
to those who pass by,
when I have taken my last.





Bread and butter, devoid of charm in the
drawing room, is ambrosia eaten under a
tree.

—*Elizabeth Von Antrim*



THE OAKS

Bob Monson

They still have beauty, the oaks, even now
In this cold Oregon December.
The finches have long since flown
The moss green and lichen grayness
And galled leaves, brown and dead beneath.
The robins, desperate for Spring, can not
See past the moss and lichen to the bare
Limbs where late they sang.

Now, outlined against the sky,
They defy age and season and the dark
Sway of the world. The texture of their form
And color, suffused in winter light,
Steadies us. We delight to find
They still have beauty, the oaks, even now.





THE OLD BURR OAK IN THE BACK YARD

Bradley Earle Hoge

I mourn the tree we cut down last fall—
dead and hollow, though the few leaves
that managed to sprout each spring
allowed me to justify its salvation—
the woodpecker's rat-a-tat-tat
like my children playing war,
the dog barking incessantly
at the squirrel teasing
from the lowest branch,
the constant litter of branches
and leaves falling into the yard,
too few to cover the ground
and protect the hard soil
from lawn, the house
from the first wind strong
enough to topple the tree—
fallen trees rejuvenate a forest
providing habitat, enrichment
of soil, tinder for fires
but if you allow them to accumulate
the fires grow out of control—
if you allow them to threaten
a neighbors fence you are liable—
if you listen to the tedious
silence of the missing tree
you come to understand
the absurdity of the world.





If trees could scream, would we be so cavalier about cutting them down? We might, if they screamed all the time for no good reason.

—*Jack Handey*



THE PATIENT'S WINDOW

Malaika Favorite

I have seen you naked,
all your bones exposed,
beaten by wind, lashed by rain,
leaning on the sky,
clinging to a cloud,
clenching your toes
in the earth and swaying,
as Hannah caught in fervent prayer;
Doing everything to survive
the rage of elements.



I watched you rest
on a soft breeze,
as the wind, now gentle,
combed your new growth of green hair,
all glorious, sporting
barrettes of pastel hues.

I saw you worry
your green hair, until it
curled into a brown crunch,
and fell gingerly to earth.
Bushels of brown and red leaves
crumpled at your feet;
while you stood, remembering days
of mayflies and robins,
lazy clouds and laughing children.



Our winters have merged
into one long cold night.
We coughed together,
as death tugged at our limbs.
I wagered it would be me
who would fall first,
flesh being more fragile than wood.

But you played too hard with fate,

you braced yourself,
when the next wind raged past,
and the violent waves
pounded upon your naked shore.



You braced yourself,
although you knew
it is better to bend,
better to sway with
the forces bigger than yourself.

You stood firm, taut,
determined not to yield.
The wind in its anger broke you,
uprooted your many toes
from your century long post.
I watched from the shelter
of my tape patched window,
as the wind hurled and jerked your limbs.
I thought I heard a cry,
a wail, then a moan,
as you crashed through a roof
and fractured in ten thousand pieces.



Months have passed
since your death.
I sit alone, staring out my window
at that violated piece of earth,
where you once held guard duty.
I cough and clutching the bed post,
stiffen my body
against that savage wind.





THE PIÑON PINE

Warren D. Jacobs

This was my first trip to Sedona, Arizona, and having heard about the spiritual nature of the landscape, I was filled with excitement and anticipation as to how I would connect with the positive energy of the area. The friendly and knowledgeable owner of the cozy bed and breakfast where my wife and I were staying told me that to find the experience I was seeking, I would have to climb a vortex. A what? When his valiant attempt to explain the concept failed, I discovered a book entitled, *What is a Vortex* by Dennis Andres, and read the following description: "A vortex is a place where the Earth is at its healthiest and most alive. The remarkable natural beauty of the area is the physical indicator of the aliveness. More importantly, the aliveness shows up in an increased energy that is present. The energy acts as an amplifier, magnifying what we bring to it on the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels." I wondered how I would know when I was *connecting* with the energy, and Dennis answered my question: "First take note of your feelings at the site... Second, pay attention to physical sensation... Third, notice the thoughts, memories or ideas that come to your mind." I was ready.

I awoke at 5 A.M. to prepare myself for climbing the Airport Mesa vortex. It was already hot that August morning and I wanted to get an early start. As I showered, I suddenly remembered another passage from the book - "tarantulas are around and about in the Sedona area." My stomach churned. What if I was bitten by a tarantula? Since I would be alone, would I be able to drive to the local hospital? How much time would I have before the toxin kills me? Who will find me? I'll never see my wife and kids again! Where is the local hospital anyway? Maybe I wasn't ready.

The sky was dimly lit as I began the short drive from the bed and breakfast to the vortex. Annoying thoughts began to plague me once again. Would I find the right spot? What would I feel? Would this be a transcendent spiritual experience? I turned left onto the Airport Mesa Road and entered the dirt parking area at the base of the hill. The sun was just starting to bathe the rust-colored rocks when I arrived. I couldn't find a discernible path, so I chose an area that appeared easy to scale and began to climb. It didn't take long to get to the top of the vortex, but the ascent was somewhat steep and a little slippery. The view from the apex was spectacular—rugged, reddish mountains on all sides, surrounding and cradling the still silent city. I was standing on a relatively flat area approximately the size of several large rooms and wondered how I would choose the *perfect spot*. A small, lone piñon pine



tree at the western edge of the rock attracted my attention. Being partial to trees, I found my place on a smooth outcropping of stone close to her left side. I breathed deeply. My spiritual journey was about to begin.

Sitting quietly and watching the sunlight slowly illuminating the mountains in front of me, I became aware of the strong and cool early morning wind on my back. I soon felt very apprehensive and all I could think about was the wind blowing me off balance and causing me to fall off the rocks on my descent. Worry, worry, fear, fear. All my life I've been ruled by fear—inadequacy, insecurity, timidity. My mind was unmerciful as my level of anxiety rose and filled my being. Suddenly, I felt something wet on my bare leg and was puzzled, as there were no rain clouds in the area. I touched the droplet. It was sticky. I turned to my right and noticed that a broken branch of the piñon pine was situated above my thigh. From the tip of that branch, small droplets of sap were forming and were being carried by the wind. The tree was wanting my attention.

I gazed at the tree standing on top of the hill and asked her how she dealt with the constant blowing of the wind. Her answer was clear—"Lean into it." And the twists of her trunk facing into the east wind told the truth of her words. As the meaning of her message penetrated my heart, I began to tremble. Do I continue to be buffeted by my fears or do I learn to lean into the vicissitudes and struggles of life to find my courage. The piñon pine had taught me a profound lesson. I no longer felt immobilized by my fear. I stood up and walked around the top of that holy place and found what appeared to be an easier way down. It then occurred to me that life offers many paths on my journey, and that my task is to take the risk to fearlessly search until I find the correct one.

I returned to the tree, stood next to her and felt my power. I held my mentor for support, strength, connection and guidance. And as the sun rose, the wind was no longer harsh, cool, forceful and intimidating, but had become warmer, gentler, peaceful and caressing. Perhaps my restless inner spirit had also become quieter, less frightened and agitated. I then moved to the center of the rock, stood on the highest energy point and turned to face all the directions. I was one with the vortex. When I turned east to face the sun with my eyes closed, I was filled with a burst of warmth and light. I felt filled with the energy of the rock from below and incredibly filled by the energy of the sun from above. I towered above the valley and was invincible.

I could have stood there forever.





The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.
—*Abraham Lincoln*



THE PRESENCE OF TREES

Michael S. Glaser

I have always felt the living presence
of trees

the forest that calls to me as deeply
as I breathe,

as though the woods were marrow of my bone
as though

I myself were tree, a breathing, reaching
arc of the larger canopy

beside a brook bubbling to foam
like the one

deep in these woods,
that calls

that whisper *home*.





THE SCREW OF THE CIDER PRESS

Timothy Walsh

There's something special about old cider presses. The tang of good cider has always seemed to me to be the flavor of enlightenment. Whatever sets free the living essence of apples also partakes of their magic. But the cider press in Anderson's barn was a mass of rusted hardware and split wood. It didn't look fit for anything more than a lawn planter. Still, it had that air of metamorphosis that cider presses always have—the latent power to transform that you sense in mills and kitchens, in freshly ploughed loam and even in a kettle of water working toward a boil.

As I stood in the half-light of the barn appraising the battered relic, I couldn't help wondering why Emma Anderson had suddenly decided to repair it after so many years. I knew from long experience that Emma always had her way, so I didn't even try to explain that a brand-new press would be cheaper than what I'd have to charge to rebuild her heirloom.

The smell of rotting hay brought back memories of the Anderson farm in better days, back when buyers would come all the way from La Crosse and Prairie du Chien to bid on the first cider pressings. Back when every tavern within miles couldn't keep enough jugs of Anderson applejack behind the bar to satisfy the local thirst. But those days were long gone. Now the orchard was overgrown with grapevine and chest-high goldenrod. It hadn't been tended in decades, and the unpruned trees had grown into a wild and impenetrable tangle. Year after year the unpicked apples had been left to rot on the ground, and thousands of apple saplings had sprouted among the older trees. If you didn't know it had once been an orchard, you'd likely mistake it for a scrap of original wilderness.

I walked around the press to the side where it was charred and blackened by the fire that burned the old cider house down. That had been over twenty years ago, the year when the apple trees on the Anderson place blossomed twice, the year when Buck Anderson was gunned down by his own son. I remember clearly the Sunday in early September all those years ago when folks from miles around came to see the Anderson orchard where the apple trees, already heavy with fruit, had strangely begun to blossom again. The delicate white flowers made the countryside come alive with spring color, but the maples had already begun turning, and the mix of new blossoms and autumn color was unsettling. Horses shied away while crows flocked to the trees in great numbers. Springtime scents mingled with the sweet smell of rotting leaves. People shook their heads and said it was not a good sign, that bad luck would follow anyone who ate an Anderson apple that year. No one would stay long on the property. Most just stopped on the side of the road for a quick inspection, then made off again whispering among themselves.



Knowing the Andersons were in for a hard season, a man from Brikelhoff's Nursery came—for about the tenth time in as many years—to ask if Buck would sell the grafting rights to his Flame Apple tree. Anderson's Flame Apples were famous throughout the valley. They were about as tart as a Northern Spy, but both sweeter and more sour at the same time. In color they were a deep crimson mottled with yellow, and when they were hanging ripe from the mammoth tree it looked like a conflagration.

There was only one Flame Apple tree because Buck, like his father before him and his father's father, thought grafting was evil, that it was a crime against nature, the first step on the path to damnation. Most people don't realize that their MacIntoshes and Jonathans and Red Delicious are all from grafted stock, each variety going back to a single scion tree discovered by chance long ago. It's all because apple trees aren't true to seed. They're like people that way. If you start with a seed, no matter what kind of apple it came from, you can never tell what sort of tree you'll get. That's the way the Andersons grew their orchard, each tree from seed, each tree a variety unto itself, no two alike. Over the years, the poor producers had been thinned and replaced till at last their sixty acres were covered with rows of beautiful old trees, many with their own individual names, like Yellow Twisted, Christmas Eve, and Jasper Green, so you thought of them like children. Some of the trees produced good table apples, but most were too wild to eat and so were pressed and blended into Anderson cider. Hard cider still sold well back then, but they pressed a fair amount of sweet cider too.

Buck Anderson was always kind of loony, but everyone tolerated him, more or less. He was dazzled by the commonest things, like bird nests and dandelions, and was notorious for smashing to pieces the gun of any unlucky hunter who strayed onto his property. Sometimes when there was a full moon, he would sit out all night talking to the apple trees and oaks. He kept a sack of rocks in the barn that he said were shooting stars. I remember once how he burst into Peabody's store all moony-eyed about a certain quality of light in the willows by the mill pond. We followed him back, but no one else saw anything special.

The year the apple trees blossomed twice, the year that ended with his own son Carl shooting him through the heart, Buck really began going off the deep end. One morning at dawn, Buck was walking through the orchard, marveling at the new blossoms, when he saw a crow on a low limb fall to the ground stone dead. He took it as a sign, a sign that death had come to the valley. He knew the crow was meant for him, so he roasted it on an apple wood fire and ate it.

That afternoon Buck went deep in the woods. Whether from eating the crow flesh or some other flight of madness he believed he could understand the language of animals. He listened to the chattering of squirrels, the twittering of birds, the throaty growl of unseen bears, and he found himself



suddenly able to understand it all. Human words were cumbersome in comparison. The wind shared her secrets with him, too, and he wondered how he could ever have been so deaf to the soft music of clouds rubbing against the sapphire sky above.

In plain language, Buck simply woke up one day and lost his mind. He'd passed over into another world, and his eyes glowed with that fierce inner light that brands the transfigured. Now he understood the meaning of the second blossoming. The voices of the forest had revealed it to him and to him alone: The apples were not to be picked that year. The coming winter would be cruelly harsh, and the bounty of the Lord was to be left as sustenance for God's wild creatures. Not one apple more could be eaten or sold, not a single bushel more pressed into cider, without bringing down the implacable wrath of He who is everywhere and unseen.

Buck emerged from the woods just after the man from Brikelhoffs Nursery arrived. He was standing with Carl under the Flame Apple tree. It was common knowledge that Carl had been wanting to turn to grafting for years. Picking up a shovel as he passed the tool shed, Buck walked straight for them like a man possessed. When Brikelhoffs man saw him coming, he held out a hand and launched into his spiel. Without even breaking stride, Buck hit him across the side of the head with the flat of the shovel, then went straight for Carl.

Carl was big and no coward, but he saw the strange light in his father's eye and knew if they fought one would leave the other dead. So he ran. Through the orchard and across acres of corn, he ran for all he was worth without knowing where to go....

Again I found myself wondering why after all these years Emma had decided to repair the old press. Considering the memories tangled up with it, I was surprised she'd kept it at all. I grabbed the handle and pushed with all my might. The wheel turned, grudgingly at first, then a little easier. It was badly rusted and made an awful noise, but at least it was still in working order. Aside from the heavy oak frame and a dozen staves, the screw was really the only thing still salvageable. But that was the essential part. After some scraping and a bit of grease, it would work like new—better in fact, since a century of breaking-in had long ago worked out any kinks.

The thought of actually using the old Anderson press again made me begin to think it was worth fixing up after all. I could almost taste that sweet brown Anderson cider, an elixir absent from the valley for twenty years. It would be like revisiting a childhood summer. Once word got out that Emma was repairing her press, there would be quite a stir among the older set. Words would fly again about the murder of Buck Anderson, the second blossoming of the trees, and the burning of the old cider house.



The day after I started work on the press, Emma came out to the barn to see how things were progressing. She was past seventy and walked with a cane, and I chided her for venturing so far without Connie, the niece who'd come to live with her.

"Never mind about that," she snapped as she took a turn around the disassembled press. "Will it be finished by Monday week?"

"I don't know," I said, trying to gauge how long I'd need. "Why?"

Emma didn't answer. She took another turn around the press, then said, "Have it done by Monday week. Work nights if you have to. I'll pay extra."

With that she made for the door, but I caught her gently by the arm. "Emma, why do you need it so soon?" She stared straight ahead and didn't say a word. "Emma," I pleaded, "you don't even have an apple crop."

After a short silence, she met my eye. "Carl's getting out on Monday. He'll want to put up some hard cider against the winter. It'd please him to see the old press working again."

So that was it! After twenty years in the state prison, Carl was finally getting out. No wonder Emma was being so secretive.

As she made her way up the hill, Emma called back, "If you can get to it, pick a few bushels for the first pressing. The orchard's a nightmare of weeds, but you'll find plenty of good apples."

What is it about a son killing a father that cuts you to the quick? This killing was unlike any other. Many felt it was self-defense, that Carl shouldn't have had to do time. But it was Carl himself who pleaded guilty and asked for the maximum sentence: death by hanging. The judge gave him life, eligible for parole in twenty, and expressed his deepest sympathy for Carl and the widow.

The fact is Carl didn't want to get off. It would have tortured him more horribly than any noose to be pronounced innocent. He would have had to relive over and over the moment he pulled the trigger and emptied both barrels of a shotgun into his father.

It all happened that same afternoon, the day Buck heard the voices in the forest and almost killed the man from Brikelhoffs. When his father was coming at him under the Flame Apple tree, Carl turned and ran all the way into town. He began to worry about leaving Emma alone on the farm with Buck, so he went straight to the sheriff's station. Nobody was there except Edgar Bynam, the dispatcher. Edgar put out a call, and Carl walked back outside to wait. The first thing he saw was smoke, heavy black smoke coming from the direction of the farm.

Carl flagged Curtis Michaels, who was passing in his pickup, and they tore back to the Anderson place. As they drew near, they could see that the cider house was in flames. Carl grabbed Curtis's shotgun and ran up the hill to where his mother lay sobbing on the ground.



"He'll burn the whole place down," Emma cried. "You've got to stop him. He's gone to chop down the Flame Apple tree."

Curtis backed his truck up the hill and managed with chains to pull the badly scorched cider press from the building just before the roof collapsed. Carl ran off in the direction of the Flame Apple tree. No one knows for sure exactly what happened there. I guess that's why people never stop talking about it. If there had been witnesses maybe it would have been forgotten by now. But there weren't any, and Carl never spoke of the matter in detail except to admit his guilt.

Some say that Buck came at Carl swinging an ax and that Carl had no choice. Once, a stranger who claimed to have known an old cellmate of Carl's was passing through. He swore that Carl told his friend it was really the father who squeezed the trigger. That Buck had walked calmly down to meet his son, pressed the leveled shotgun to his own chest, then worked his thumb in over Carl's trigger finger and, asking forgiveness, fired. The drifter was only an old drunk, so not many believed him, but it made people even more uncertain than they had been.

In any case, it's a fact that Buck had taken an ax to the Flame Apple tree and had cut deep into its heart when a blast from Curtis Michaels' shotgun cut him down. It's a fact that Carl, seeing his father lying in a pool of blood, took up the ax himself and with tears streaming down his face finished chopping down the tree. And it's a fact that the two of them were pinned under the Flame Apple tree when it fell—Buck already dead and Carl with a broken collarbone and crushed ribs.

Well, I had the press finished on time, working past midnight more than once. Bright and early on Monday an unmarked car dropped Carl at the end of the lane with only a large duffel bag to show for twenty years. He'd gone entirely gray, wore an untrimmed beard, and seemed only half his former bulk. Still I knew him for the Carl Anderson I picked apples alongside of many a late summer as a teenager.

On his way up to the house, he looked in at the barn and nodded approval when he saw the cider press and the floor littered with fresh oak shavings. "Looks good," he said as simply as if he'd never been away from the place at all, then he walked slowly on up the hill.

A few hours later, Emma and Carl stopped in to ask if I'd walk with them up by the orchard. There were still a few finishing touches needed on the press, but the invitation came more as a privilege granted than a favor asked, so I put everything aside and walked up the rise with them. Neither Carl nor Emma spoke much. They looked around a little lost, taking in the countryside in a saddened yet satisfied way.

We passed along the edge of the orchard, a weedy tangle of brambles and grapevine, until we came upon a path I hadn't noticed before. It took us deep into the heart of the grove, deep into the lattice-work of tangled, unpruned branches. The thicket was alive with birds and rabbits. Scarlet tanagers and



orioles darted and swooped through the foliage, leaving dazzling traces of reds and oranges in their wake.

At last we came into a large clearing where a few trees had obviously been tended and the weeds held in check on a regular basis. In the center, a single tree rising from three main trunks arched overhead, gnarled and twisted and heavy with fruit. The apples were a peculiar color, deep crimson streaked with yellow.

"Flame Apples!" I gasped.

Carl plucked one and bit into it with such gusto you'd have thought it the fruit of the gods.

"But I thought..." I stammered.

"No one knows but us," Emma said. "Let's keep it that way for now."

"But how..."

"The spring after it all happened, the stump sent up suckers from the base. It seemed the tree was spiting me, with Buck dead and Carl in jail, so I hacked them down in a fit of anger. Later that summer it sent up three more shoots, and I let them live. When Connie came to help out, I had her tend only the Flame Apple, keeping the path clear and pruning the limbs back each year. I daresay it's a better tree now than it ever was. Try one."

I gently pulled one from overhead. The sensation as my mouth closed on that exquisite, sweetly tart flesh, after decades of tasting them only in dreams, is something I can never hope to describe. Essence runs to essence, I suppose, and any good apple leaves you wondering what there is in you akin to such unearthly sap, what sweetness might be diffused through your own bloodstream, what distillation of desire makes up the soul.

That very day, Carl began clearing and thinning the orchard, keeping a few of the most promising saplings and pruning back the older trees. He didn't make much headway, but I knew by this time next year the orchard would be again as it had been.

In the end I suppose Buck had his way. With Carl locked up and Emma in mourning, not an apple was touched in the orchard that year, the year the trees blossomed twice. It was a harsh and terrible winter, thirty below for long stretches with snow drifting to five or six feet. No doubt countless creatures would have perished except for the unlimited store of apples on the Anderson place. So maybe Buck wasn't so crazy after all.

At day's end, Carl began pressing the few bushels of apples I'd picked from the fringes of the orchard. The screw worked like a charm—smoothly bringing down the force of muscle, the force of will, the force of desire onto the pliant apple flesh, forcing the glowing essence through the staves in trickling, vital rivulets.



If I knew I would die tomorrow, I would plant a tree today.
—*Stephen Girard*



THE SHAPE OF THE UNIVERSE

Howard Rheingold

Kids know about trees, and the easiest way to remember what the world was like when you were a kid is to climb a tree. Kids climb them, lie down under them and look up at the dappled sunlight, hang swings from them, build houses in them, paint pictures of them, collect their leaves. Today's kids know that trees are disappearing because of human activity, and they know that trees are the lungs of the biosphere. This means the act of planting a tree with a child has taken on ecological as well as psychological and spiritual significance. Years ago, I discovered the Bantu word that can teach us something valuable: *mahamba*.

A mahamba is a "spirit-tree" that is planted when a child is born. We can make tree-planting both a part of family life and a sacred act again. We could start with a new meme Ñ an idea deliberately designed to be infectious.

As soon as possible after birth, take the child and its parents to plant a mahamba. Make sure the tree is native to the local environment and that it will be accessible in the future. Finding the proper place to plant and obtaining an appropriate seedling might not be easy. Overcoming these obstacles is the spiritual offering of the child's sponsor. As soon as the child is able to walk, bring them out to meet the tree and to feed it. Encourage the child to take over the care and feeding, and seal the responsibilities with gifts. Continue reinforcing the merit to be gained from the act, in whatever terms the child understands. The legend of a tree that brings good fortune might be a harmless myth that can teach more than a hundred hard facts. The simple act of nurturing a tree, distributed memetically, repeated recursively, might help mankind get a grip on our planet's runaway throttle.





THE SPEECH OF TREES

Cynthia Gallaher

If there is a musical world
a hidden side to the one we know,
it is filled with the
speech of trees.

Between our insistence on high-speed motion
and broad destinations reached by gas,
trees prefer staying put.

Part memory, part nested bird, part grave,
roots push and drink deeply of rainwater,
branches view the same land day after day,
but its sap droplets create lenses,
with each sway, taking a different snapshot.



Between our insistence on finding
our place in the sun,
trees shade us
before we collapse from arrogance.

Between our insistence on slipcasing
imperfection with tempered steel and glass,
trees encase themselves
in natural error and chance,
with bumpy and thick bark,
and no two leaves alike.

If left to its own device,
imperfection reaches an exquisite height,
and lives an immortal length of time,
compared to us.



And trees' elevators—birds
and passengers—color and sound
in autumn-bright foliage and percussive branches,
and if we don't have the sense
to raise our arms and pick fruit,
the food is thrown
right at our feet.





A seed hidden in the heart of an apple is an orchard invisible.
— *Welsh Proverb*



THE TALLOW TREES

J. C. Watson

The Tallow tree. I say its name
over and over. Tallow, wax-like leaves,
Disneyland leaves, that clack
against each other like the Italian Poplars
outside my brothers' bedroom, all summer
where I entered, an interloper on steamy afternoons
to read and listen to their sounds, their loud whisperings.



The same sound as the Poplars
in the vacant farm field that someone cut once in awhile,
where we'd gathered the long grasses—fragrant.
How they bled their fragrance and their green blood.
Between those Poplars, taller than parents or houses
or the new front yard trees, taller than anything
we might have imagined, we made beds of grass
and here we lay deep in hayey mounds
watching the trunks bend and unbend,
close the sky and open it again.
Autumn and the green all used up,
the yellow sang out in defiance.

Tallows' leaves melt into red, the Garden Center
Man promises. I want to ask him how red?
Orange red like the Scarlet Maple
in front of the farmhouse down the street
from my childhood home with its wet black velvet trunk?
Or crimson like the plums I never knew the names of?
Will the light come through the leaves?



Will they leap into fire, will the light come through,
be taken up by throat, head and spirit.

And when the fire is out will the branches
knit and unknit in December wind?
Will they wave their black wires
against the bruised dusk of evening?
Be abused by storms, knarled and twisted
by storms, helpless in storms,
clutching at the earth that promises nothing?

Four Tallows, finger thick, the seeds of which have come
all this way from China, pathetic spindles
await their roots' burial, a first rain, an ignorant bird
to pause on their surprised branches,
await on the back porch, their immobile lives—
like any of us, unprepared for their own stories.





THE TREE

Jeffica Barnes

The bud burst forth
and tiny, green, new birth
bunched together came
through the pod like
everlasting life...

From blossoms to buds...
to tiny green foliage into
long fluffed leaves...
the cycle of life...

Yellow and brown...they fall,
only to return again...
next year and burst forth
tiny, green, new birth, bunched
together from a pod like
everlasting life...





He who plants a tree loves others beside himself.
—*Thomas Fuller*



THE TREE

Vivina Ciolli

begins at top and moves
 wide to the sides
 and down with strokes
 of green, yellow, orange,
 red, brown, depending on the time
 of year and where the tree is planted,
 Country, I mean
 Down from all the green (or whatever)
 under the branches, holding things up,
 is the trunk. Not an elephant's,
 but a tree's, rough
 or smooth, again
 depending
 on where
 it's
 planted
 and
 also
 its
 type
 and
 what
 sea
 son.
 Age
 counts
 too.
 Like
 your
 color
 changes
 depending on many things
 including Country and season
 and age.





Reg Saner

Seeing is not believing. Any tree “acting out” in such hog wild and crazy ways—or so I used to feel—can’t be truly arboreal. This one thinks it’s a mad dog. Here’s another trying to prove chaos might be a conifer. Yet another so cleft and warped it looks like self-knowledge. Or is it just pretending to summarize World History?

Botanically speaking, of course, a juniper can’t be perverse. As a dirt-common member of the cypress family it can at worst be only an oddball conifer. Other arboreal species may echo states we recognize in ourselves, but none I’ve run across seems so moody and emotional. Lifelong, we humans conceal our intimate histories, even while a version of them gets slowly written into our faces. This tree’s neurotic past, however, appears at a glance, visible through many feigned identities. Admittedly, cone-bearing trees in general may be tricky to tell apart, not to mention the taxonomic hair-splitting you’d need for identifying some sixty species of juniper. But recognizing the desperate types I have in mind is easy.

First you see billowing curds and clouds of green needles on twigs wispy as string and nearly as limp. Those “needles,” however, have evolved to minuscule scales glossy-green and trimly overlapping. Evolution has also downsized the juniper’s cones to virtual berries. Yet each berrylike cone retains tiny nibs, comers almost, as if hinting their spheres remember once being otherwise. Beneath erstwhile needles now smoother than snake skin, and under cones shrunk to beads, a greyish-brown welter of wood appears. If it looks like tensed muscle and sinew, that illusion and the preceding traits do add up to generic juniper. But if the bark is shaggy as hanks of unbraided sisal; if the absolutely motionless trunk seems to be groveling in frenzy or twisting like smoke; and if in even the best-behaved specimen you see branches that mime devastation having a temper tantrum, you know you’re dealing with *Juniperus osteosperma*, Utah juniper. You know the example before your eyes is a special case: a high-desert strain of that species, one growing where it ought not to try.

If animal, such trees would be camels, and they almost are. But what camel drinks sand? Hence the near-incredulity. On a sun-spattered, all-but-windless morning, you may stand smack in front of one, gasping at its self-tormented trunk fed by red sand or by the crevice in a rock. Yet on naked stone those knotted roots have knuckled down to sipping a trunk and limbs into life. From a low writhing branch you might strip off a fibrous dangle of bark the creature seems clad in, all threads and shreds and tatters, like a beggar’s rags. Obviously the bark’s stringy hairs are real. Just as clearly, its tree *as tree* lacks full credibility. The riven trunk, the gesturing limbs in every style of passion, cannot be anything Nature approves, much less intended.



That's why, in your earliest encounters with Utah juniper—and especially if you've seen how Tuscan farmers cleave and otherwise torture olive trunks into yielding larger crops along their terraced groves—you're bound to wonder about botanical vandalism. Novice-like, you stand there just staring and shaking your head: "Surely someone has *done* this?"

Surely yes. Such a juniper-storm of contortion must have been *caused*.

When it was only a seedling had an off-road vehicle run it over? Had it been troampled by a grazing steer? Had some nineteenth century ranch hand ridden it down? Or, because junipers can easily be many hundred years old, had some Spanish explorer whacked away at it with his axe? Plain as sunlight, the tree half standing, half disheveling before you cannot in the course of nature have become what it is today.

But viewing entire swathes of them you're forced to discard your vandalism theory almost before it forms. Nonetheless, a lingering suspicion may recur to insist that no tree unmolested would grow as this one before you is clearly seen to be growing. The postures vary too greatly for wind to explain them. Wind produces a leaning away from, as with Monterrey cypress along the California shore, or timberline trees in the Rocky Mountain high country. Where prevailing currents distort trees, you see unanimity. They all know in their bones which way the wind blows, so on that they agree without dissent. Besides, what wind could pretzel a trunk?

In the earliest phase of my fascination, conjectures of human abuse often wrestled a moment with something a lot older than botany. Even now, my absent-minded look at one or another extravagant specimen can revive animism without half trying. Animism's primitive belief that each thing—cloud, pebble, cave, or lake—is enspirited and might have sprung from the same seed as Utah juniper.

More than once, in me anyhow, it has given that archaic belief a new twist. At dusk, moving through a forest of high-desert juniper while forgetting our century (and myself as a child of its science) I've often—for six or eight milliseconds—gone backward in time. I have turned primitive enough for a juniper's spirit to take over mine. Then with a smile (or blush) of self-exorcism, my awareness would shake off that twilight tree-soul.

Not with a shudder, I've always liked the idea of being a tree, though without bothering much about what kind. Modesty prevents even thinking "sequoia." Aspens are lovely yet giddy, their leaves having such a short attention span. Lodgepole pine? No, too thick sown amid themselves ever to let understory bushes grow at their feet. "All of us," they seem to say, "and none of you." Douglas fir are less clannish but seem honor-bound forever to stand at attention, whereas blue spruce prefer to be comfortable. My respect for stamina, as in hackberry and Gambel oak, doesn't mean I'd go to the



extreme of becoming one. Utah's more cantankerous junipers have enough hardihood to make me half worship them, but just looking at one feels like work. A single day of *being* such a Gordian gnarl would exhaust me. That's why, whenever a juniper's soul tries getting possession of mine, I'm never so flattered as to abandon the actual. We survive by knowing our limits.

Fact is among Utah juniper of the high desert, flabbergasting abnormality is the norm only for individual trees defying limitation. Lots of rock, lots of sand, lots of wind, and very little rain can make juniper stands growing there, at the far end of possibility, an outpost of marginalized eccentrics. Not the whole species. No, the stressed-out examples I'm talking about, the trees you can see without quite believing, grow where they almost can't—at their ecological edge. We think timberline a question of mountain altitudes beyond which no conifer can rise. For desert junipers, timberline may be a threshold drawn in the sand not in the rarefied air, but by rain—lower than which there is none. Making this plant standoffish, like desert flora in general. The more arid the clime, the more space between survivors.

"Between competitors" puts that same desert fact differently. Botanists speak of this juniper as "intolerant" of shade, an apparent disadvantage may be a strength. It keeps offspring from growing up at home, lest their roots rival the parent tree in its quest for moisture. Viable cones that want to become trees need to hope a bird or coyote will deign to swallow them. Animals can't digest the cone's seeds, can only excrete them—probably far from the parent tree where they have almost no chance. So the boughs of Utah junipers often seem simply drenched with berrylike cones, every cone holding three seeds.

But that's nature—always spending far too much, so as to spend enough. It's also desert life judging from innumerable juniper cadavers strewn over desert floor, so many die trying to live. I'll not describe their mummified trunks in any detail, how the exposed, bark-lorn grain bleaches gray, then blackens. Nor describe how, after long, sun-riddled exposure, that grain delaminates and splays open. Nor emphasize the crackle and pop of shattered twigs, eerie as brittle bones stepped on, when you walk round such a trunk to inspect it. Saying that those defunct junipers remind me of casualties in war would seem exaggeration enough. They always remind me of atrocities: of passionate creatures made to die by inches, in pain unspeakable. I have felt this for years, with no thought of writing about it, nor have those years changed my reaction. It's as unbidden as it is invariable. I cannot *not* feel for them. Sadly, I look down at their death throes and shake my head, as if at inflictions so cruel the torturers had to be human.



One most notable aspect I must dwell on is how the fallen trunks lie, twisted as they grew, like a washcloth wrung dry. I've found those whose torso has turned a full 360 degrees in less than seven inches of length! When I photograph examples it's not because I suppose nobody will believe me. A month later, I may not believe myself.

If not so common, any *stress-ridden* Utah juniper would be a museum piece. I've never visited a collection of rarities offering anything this astonishing—yet so common that it covers vast stretches of Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and into western Colorado. Despite these millions of junipered acres, if you somehow uprooted one, loosening its rockbound grip on desert life, and put it in a museum...the credibility gap would widen to a chasm. Few people unfamiliar with Southwestern flora would believe *the example* untampered with. They'd murmur to themselves, "This isn't nature's work. It must be some kind of hoax." At the very least, they'd think it a mutant so atypical of its species as to have been displayed solely for its shock value.

It's by taking root at the threshold of impossibility that this most irrational tree grows against all reason. Grows to fit any shape of amazement. Compulsively so. By contrast, the lumber industry would welcome a wholly reasonable tree; *Arbor sapiens*, maybe, or *Arbor cogitans*. Trees that would grow erect, straight-grained, knot-free. If gene-splicing scientists ever set out to contrive this, they couldn't do better than to plunk themselves down in front of the oldest, most outlandish Utah juniper discoverable to engender its opposite. Meanwhile, my favorite junipers are barely good for even themselves, much less for wood products—unless bent toothpicks and shaggy matches should come into fashion. As one forestry expert puts it, "such a tree is unmerchutable." Sawmills wouldn't know where to begin. Or why.

Repeatedly I have stood before one, even climbed into one, and felt unable to make sense of it. I literally couldn't tell if I were looking at one tree or two or several. Couldn't see where its—or their—main limbs either began or ended. No wonder a Utah juniper at the edge of its range is either so distraught or far gone in perplexity it can't make sense of itself. "Do you suppose I'd have grown this way," it seems to snort, "if I'd had any idea what I was getting into?" Its confusion is echoed by botanists, who categorize the species as "a shrub or small tree." But which? As a rule of thumb, trees are plants you can walk under. To do that with most examples of *Juniperus osteosperma*, you'd have to duck for part of the way and tunnel the rest. There are plenty of indisputable trees—blue spruce, to name one—offering similar obstruction. Then too, on seeing a plant tall as any giraffe, and with trunks a foot or two thick, we're disinclined to say "shrub."



Although the specimens I admire would indeed make more interesting museum pieces than many a prize now under glass, I realize that bringing just the tree inside wouldn't do. You'd need to bring with it the thin air of its Southwestern plateau. You'd need that powdery fine sand, red as rust. The rippled dunes sparsely tufted with greasewood or Indian rice grass. And skies blue as chicory petals. Floating puffs of cumulus cloud, their slow undersides tinted by the red miles beneath them. Birdsong as well: rock wrens, horned larks, mockingbirds, vireos, piñon jays, scrub jays, cowbirds, towhees. And vultures. Above all, you'd need the desert sun with its glare, its incomparable clarities, deep shadows.

Such a maverick plant looks unlikely for any useful purpose, but on the rock-naked hardpan of Arizona where we might see nothing but pure desolation, Indians saw food, firewood, weaving material, building supplies, and even medicine. Millennia of desert necessity taught Indians—present-day and prehistoric—to explore every last one of the juniper's possibilities.

Mere minutes of hands-on experience can suggest at least a couple of uses. Take the tree's inner bark and work it a moment to see how easily it goes all to pieces, and is a natural tinder. For the Indians that's some of what it was: fire-starter, a wad of which would be carried in the a buckskin pouch with flints, or kept with the fire bow and drill. But the inner bark was good for more than just tinder. When rubbed to a fine frazzle it became diapers for infants, bedding for cradle boards and for invalids, menstrual cloths, dressing for wounds. Braided, its fibers turned rope. Though the Anasazi usually wove their sandals of yucca leaves, I've come upon bits and pieces of juniper-bark sandal. Unwoven and sparingly mixed with clay the same bark helped adobe bind to willow-wand partitions and freestone interiors. Though Anasazi pottery used clay tempered with crushed stone or shards, juniper fibers seem to have been used occasionally. Examples of bark-laced adobe occur in many of the Utah canyons, and across the Southwest. Over those clay-plastered walls I've seen hundreds of juniper roof-traves. In sandstone caves I've come to expect—along with the usual potsherds and corn cobs—flecks of charcoal left many centuries ago by the Anasazi, who burnt juniper for cooking and warmth. Not knowing what the world's most fragrant firewood may be, I do know that at campsites throughout Utah, New Mexico and Arizona, my nostrils have inhaled juniper smoke like incense. Navajos still use it for hogans, firewood, corrals and cradle boards. The Hopi rely on it, as do the Pueblos, both for daily living and their year-cycle of ceremonies. To this hour, nobody travels the Four-Corners area without seeing juniper palings, fenceposts, and stock pens wherever people are or have been. The juniper wood is too stubborn not to take its time about rotting.

Then there's juniper-as-sustenance. Its so-called berries have long been eaten by humans and animals...every season, one or two by me. Edibility varies, depending on species and on who you talk to.



One modern authority calls the berries “not actually inedible.” In my view, “edibility” depends on your being ten days into starvation. A old proverb says hunger’s the best sauce. Add the berries’ eye-appeal—often considerable—and your hand would reach out to them. Their blue haze smudging from under the thumb is like the breath of yeast on a grape; a blue lovely and thin as air on a planet.

So much for looks. Analysis of Rocky Mountain juniper, *Sabina scopulorum*, reveals “a high percentage of sugar,” but if it’s there it’s hiding. Crush a berry off that species or off a Utah juniper and your thumb and forefinger will smell vaguely of gin. Suck on the berry’s strongly resinous pulp and you taste broad hints of turpentine. Yet we know Indians ate juniper berries raw, boiled or roasted. Taking dried berries from their winter stores, they ground them into a consistency mealy enough for a sort of juniper-berry gruel, or for patting into cakes. Ash from burning the scale-like needles could flavor boiling water which, when strained of sediment, pepped up other foods.

Indian resourcefulness was never exhausted. The berries’ waxy coating could be boiled off and skimmed for rubbing into leather, bowstrings, or cordage. Roasted berries were ground between two stones for making a sort of Indian coffee. A medicinal, tea-like decoction was made from young shoots. Junipers provided jewelry. Navajos still collect the pebble-hard seed within each berry for drilling and stringing with tiny glass beads of various colors.

Within the so-called mystery of life, the greater mystery is will. Why has life fought so intensely long and cleverly against taking “No!” for its answers? Where rock and sand and desert conditions seem to echo an indifferent cosmos, seem to virtually demand that one or another seedling give in to the forces against life, a juniper may buckle and distort like anguish itself, but refuse to throw in the sponge—as if to say, “I wouldn’t give them the satisfaction!”

Maybe that’s why, roving the Grand Canyon’s south rim, I have spent hours more intrigued by its pygmy forest of pinons and junipers than by the view. Yes, the canyon’s an erosional wonder; but it’s a triumph of gravity, of force pulling in the downward direction, while life strives upward in the opposite direction.

There, happily stumbling over outcrops of chert and Kaibab limestone, well-content at being scolded by pinon jays, I have come upon deep depression and recovery—both alive in the same tree. How had it grown so depressed? Through wrestling for its own affections? Or was it too much a shape-shifter ever to tire of dilemma? How had recovery and relapse spread from the same trunk? Because its moods (like ours) don’t believe in each other? There I found trees giving instructions in bravery as if to say “struggle” doesn’t touch me.



During that same afternoon I came upon the very juniper who, once it discovered witchcraft, couldn't quit practicing. Then found countless others its bad example converted, as if they had used forbidden spells to demand eternal life *and* youth. They seemed the picture of what happens when only the first half is granted, the picture of how losers look when they win.

There amid the deranged and violent I also discovered "good" trees battering on the same rimrock. I witnessed all the living optimism, all the hurt joy that can scuffle upward out of such rock. In wresting a living from limestone's long famines of rain, they must sometimes have felt that enduring there was next to impossible, yet they endured.

We admire most, I suppose, those virtues our souls utterly lack, or need more of. Even after twenty years, therefore, I'm apt to be spellbound by the drama of a particular trunk and limbs. My feelings of sympathy and awe before such pure indomitability cost nothing. Yet I've often stood, and often a longish while, unaware of these feelings, as if hoping a touch of juniper courage might agree to come with me.





Some see Nature all ridicule and deformity, and
some scarce see Nature at all. But to the eyes of
the man of imagination, Nature is Imagination
itself.

— *William Blake*



THE TREE IN THE MEADOW

Carol Wade Lundberg

The tree became a part of her without her really knowing it. When they were building the house, it was only an object in their neighbor's field. She was only vaguely conscious of its giant trunk and massive green canopy shading her feverish activity as the foundation, walls, floor, and roof were finally completed. Since the tree was not on her property, but on the other side of the fence separating her property from the neighbor's, she never walked or sat under it, or felt its rough bark beneath her fingers.

So it remained at the corner of her mind, like other objects that surrounded her, even, it might be said, like her husband and children—too familiar to be really noticed except in some part of us that records shifts in light and shadow and the changing shapes and colors of the seasons. But since its massive form was plainly visible from the front windows of the house, whether she was indoors or out, its stately form was gradually imprinted on her life.

She had always been a doer. Raising five children, keeping house with vigor, loving best those tasks involving unreflective pleasures of movement, touch, and smell—freshly waxed floor; wet clothes flapping in the sun or dried and neatly stacked on chairs and tables. A house filled with the smells of cookies, pies, and roasting chickens. The plenty of her garden canned and strung like jewels along her pantry shelves.

"I hardly have time to think," she often told her husband and children with harried cheerfulness. Although they sometimes wished for her undivided attention, her strength and resourcefulness were things to be counted on. When the children were older and there was less to do at home, she busied herself with community activities, hurrying along the halls of convalescent hospitals with firm, cheerful steps, bunches of flowers or shoe boxes of freshly baked cookies in her arms. She directed political rallies, garage sales, and local fairs with energetic evenhandedness. Pragmatic to the core, she made decisions quickly, was a person who "got things done."

As the children began to marry and move away, she sensed some impending vacuum that her many activities might not fill. Her husband was about to retire from his job as the manager of a hardware store. To persuade him to move to the country, she had talked about his need for some kind of hobby, her wish for a real garden and a special place for the grandchildren to visit. He had listened with his usual patience, seeing no need to elaborate on an agenda of his own. A silent man, as little given to words as she was to reflection, he was not without purposes or opinions of his own, but was content to pursue them quietly at the edges of her whirlwind activities.



It was not that she was frivolous or an idle chatterer, but her thoughts were driven by her need for activity like froth on moving water. His were hidden beneath slow, deliberate movements that revealed little.

They bought the piece of property a few miles outside town and when the house was completed, she started a garden. Over the long, dry summer, the fields turned to gold, but the tree on the other side of the fence remained a deep green, its branches swaying in the afternoon wind above the shimmering grass. Gradually, its dark, graceful shape lodged itself in the unexplored corners of her mind.

As time passed, there was again so much to do, even for her prodigious energy, that she saw her friends less often. Frequently she found she couldn't spare the time for church, at least during the growing season; its hour or so of enforced inactivity had always made her restless anyway.

She began to plant fruit trees and to think about starting pine seedlings to sell at Christmas. But when she was deciding where to put them, she couldn't bring herself to break up the view across the meadow to the tree. So she chose the field facing the road for her seedlings and put the fruit trees along the south side.

"After all," she told her husband, "we can always rent that field for pasture. That way the space won't be wasted."

He sucked thoughtfully on the stem of his pipe, but found no reason to disagree.

At the end of each day, without quite knowing why she began to sit on the porch facing the distant tree, never on the side porch, though it was screened and had a nice view of her flourishing garden. Her husband refinished an old walnut rocker that had belonged to her mother and added a pair of arm rests and a wide cane seat so that she could relax in comfort. She would rock slowly, not looking at anything in particular, enjoying that fragile time before sunset when the air stills and everything seems to be waiting for night to fall. The last bit of yellow light along the rim of the sky would make the edges of the tree glow and the meadow appear as if it were on fire. Without ever forming the thought in her conscious mind, she felt as if she and the tree were keeping each other company in the waning light.

Then in September, her middle son, his wife and new baby were killed in an auto accident. As she read the telegram for the second time, the tightly wound inner clock that directed all her activities gave way. She spent the following days sitting stiffly in the wingback chair where she had first read the news, speaking only when she was spoken to, eating only when someone brought her food, going to bed when the sky turned dark, and returning to the same chair each morning.



At first her family waited for her to decide about the funeral, the flowers, an appropriate memorial. When it became clear that she would or could not, they began awkwardly to decide things among themselves, coming to tell her of each decision as she sat in austere indifference, her only acknowledgement a brief nod.

When the house was finally clear of people and her two remaining children could no longer stay to puzzle over what would become of her, they left her to their father and returned to their homes. At first he respected her silence, understanding her grief through his own. But when she continued to sit rigidly in the chair by the window, rising only to perform the most essential personal or domestic tasks, he became frightened. She would do the laundry only when she could find nothing clean to wear, shop only when the refrigerator was empty, feed the dog only when his whining became an unbearable irritation to her silence.

He stopped doing her chores in the hope that the disorder would drive her to action. But when weeks stretched into months and she continued her pattern of minimal activity, he hired the teenage daughter of one of their neighbors to come in after school.

All that fall and into the winter she continued to sit in front of the window, staring out at the rain-drenched meadow and the stark outline of the tree, now barren and stripped of leaves against a harsh grey sky. She winced as if struck at the well-intentioned queries of friends and family and their efforts to cheer her with bright conversations about the activities of a world about which she no longer cared.

Only the tree asked nothing of her and did not mock her pain with the false colors of hope. Its bare branches reached upward like the arms of an empty crucifix robbed of its object of grief as she had been robbed of her son. It seemed to mirror the starkness of her heart.

At the end of February, when there was a break in the rain, she asked her husband to bring her rocker out on the porch so she could look across at the tree without the barrier of the windows. They had somehow made her feel as if she were a prisoner while the tree stood desolate but free outside. Lost in her private communion with the tree, she failed to notice the increasing cold as she sat outside one evening after supper.

The next morning she had a fever and became dizzy when she tried to go to the bathroom. By night she was having trouble breathing. They took her to the hospital where she drifted in and out of consciousness, feeling in her lucid moments a kind of relief that everything was finally out of her hands and she was no longer being urged to "pull herself together."



One night she dreamed that her son and his wife and new baby had come to visit. In the dream it was summer, and she took them outside to see her garden. Suddenly it began to rain large, pelting drops.

"The baby will get wet," her son said anxiously.

"Never mind," she answered calmly, taking him by the hand and leading them, not back into the house, which had somehow shrunk, but across the meadow toward the shelter of the tree. They climbed the fence that separated them from their neighbor's field and hurried under its dense green branches.

"See," she said to her son, "this is much better. The baby will keep dry and we can watch the rain come down. See how it washes the air clean! Can you smell it? Can you feel the earth swelling?"

They stood together under the tree listening to the sound of rain against the leaves, inhaling the damp air rising from the wet grass until darkness covered them.

When she woke, her fever had broken. She lay in the hospital bed with its odorless white sheets remembering her dream for several minutes before she also remembered that her son, his wife, and baby were dead. Pain filled her with a physical sharpness that all her months of mourning had never possessed. She lay very still, letting it wash over her without resistance, waiting to return to the womb of numbness where she had hidden since the news first came. But her senses were working again and would not let her retreat.

A few days later she was discharged. She said nothing on the long drive home. Her husband, accustomed to her silence by now, had his own thoughts to occupy him. The house had been cleaned from top to bottom and vases of spring flowers had been placed around the living room. Her habit of inattention was so strong that at first she scarcely noticed the polished table tops and bright bunches of crocus and daffodils. But something expectant and shining in the neighbor girl's face pulled at her like an old habit. After a minute or two, she reached out and patted the girl's arm.

"I will tell your father," she said somewhat formally, as one speaking a foreign language, "what a good job you have done."

She waited somewhat uneasily to see if the girl had understood the intention of her message. It seemed to have been enough and the girl left, her wide smile undiminished. But the effort of paying attention was too new and she felt very tired.

Her husband had been watching her anxiously. "Your rocker is on the porch," he said, taking her by the arm. "Come sit awhile until lunch is ready."



He didn't mention that it had been left out in the rain to swell and crack in the confusion of her sudden illness. Or that while she was in the hospital, he had spent countless hours stripping, sanding, and revarnishing it, the one tangible thing he could do.

She let him help her out to the porch where a warm March sun splashed off the weathered redwood boards and clay pots of flowers. When her eyes became accustomed to the light, she glanced out across the meadow toward the tree as she had done so many times during her long months of mourning. But when she looked up, anticipating the starkness that had echoed her own grief, she grew rigid with shock. No longer a scaffold of black against the horizon, it had again become a green flame against the relentless blue spring sky. Trembling with rage, she fell back into the rocker.

Slowly her trembling subsided, followed by a strange draining away of will. She continued to stare at the tree, its branches moving in the wind. The sounds of rustling leaves and humming insects came to her across the field. Her gaze fell away and she noticed individual points of color that became wildflowers in the green meadow grass, then the dog sleeping at the bottom of the steps in a dead man's pose, next a rise in the porch floor where the nails had come loose, and finally, the newly finished wood beneath her fingers. The tree receded from her consciousness and became again a simply cool green mass somewhere to the left of her vision. She felt the sun on her face and beads of perspiration on her forehead.

"It's going to be hot," she said out loud to no one.

Getting up from the chair, she ran her fingers thoughtfully over its polished surface, then moved it carefully into the shade and went into the house. Her husband was slicing tomatoes at the oversized white sink she had chosen because it was big enough for canning. She watched him for a minute or two, as if trying to remember something just at the tip of her memory. Then she reached for the knife.

"I'll finish that," she told him. "You know I always like to save the seeds if they look like good ones. Some say they don't do well, but I've gotten some mighty fine canning that way without paying a penny."





THE TREE THAT ALMOST ENDED MY LIFE

John Gilgun

This happened thirty-one years ago. I was on a pack trip in the San Juan Mountains of southern Colorado. We'd ridden horseback up narrow trails and switchbacks when we pitched camp for the night. In the early morning light we again saddled our horses, leaving the cook and her daughters at the camp, and set out for a lake higher up the mountain. There were twelve of us with a guide and his boy. I didn't know my hosts well. They were friends of my friend Neil and I had asked if I could go along. Everyone had a nickname and mine was Eastern Dude because I was born in Boston.

We were on a trail which crossed a rocky meadow. I was behind the guide and his boy. Looking back over my shoulder I could see everyone on their horses strung out across a high Alpine meadow. I had never ridden a horse before but I'd had no trouble with my horse, Paint. I had learned on the previous day how to ride and I had discovered that I was good at it. I knew the commands.

What happened couldn't have taken more than a microsecond and almost all of it happened in my mind. We were riding along a grove of trees. They were to our left on a slight rocky rise. I saw a shadow. My immediate thought was that it was a cougar leaping from one of the branches of a tree. I had the image of a cougar in my mind. The thought that followed this was perhaps not a thought but a response, I slapped my knees against Paint's ribs and he bounded forward. My third thought, and it was a real thought, clear and unmistakable, was "If a cougar has jumped from a tree branch, it's better that he lands on Paint's back than on my own." I threw myself off the horse and rolled through the meadow, miraculously tumbling between the stones and boulders. I was unhurt. I looked up to see Paint running away through the meadow, the guide riding after him in pursuit.

The shadow I had seen was not the shadow of a cougar. It was a dead tree falling toward me. In the thin, rocky Alpine soil the tree had not been able to put down deep roots. The vibrations from the horse's hoofs had been enough to uproot it and send it falling toward me. I remember that I actually heard a whistling noise as it fell. Had I not pressed my knees sharply against Paint's ribs and had Paint not bounded forward I'd have been crushed under the weight of this tree. That automatic response saved my life.

The guide's boy had dismounted and he ran to me. He knelt down and asked if I was hurt. I had had time to look back at the others and I could see that Ms. Lahey, who had organized the trip, was lying on the ground. The ground had shaken when the tree hit it and this had startled the horses.



Ms. Lahey's horse had reared back in fright and she had been thrown. She wasn't moving and I thought she might be dead. I told the boy, "I'm fine. See to Mrs. Lahey."

Ms. Lahey had fallen on a rock and cracked her rib. We had a doctor on the trip and he took off his belt and wrapped it around her ribs. She would have to ride that way back to the camp. Then, after the camp was dismantled, she would have to ride back down to the ranch from which we'd started. But she was up to it, which was good as there was no other way for her to get back. The nearest ranger station was in Durango several mountain ranges away.

The guide came back with Paint. Ms. Lahey's horse, Patches, was still spooked. She wanted to ride my horse, Paint, because he was calm and gentle even after his experience. We all agreed that since we had set out for the lake we might as well continue on since Ms. Lahey could ride and I was unhurt. An hour later we got to the lake and sat more or less in silence, deep in our thoughts, staring at the still water.

The guide sat down in the grass beside me. I noticed that he was packing a revolver in a holster.

"If the tree had hit me and I'd been buried under it and in great pain, would you have put me out of my suffering by shooting me?" I asked.

"No," he answered. "I'd have shot the horse if he'd been under the tree. But I wouldn't have shot you."

"Even if the situation was hopeless and I was going to die anyway and I was in terrible pain?"

"No, I wouldn't have shot you," he answered.

We rode back to the camp later that afternoon. Someone sloshed a bottle of gin and a whisper of vermouth into a large pitcher. Everyone drank to our miraculous luck. I had not been crushed under the tree and Ms. Lahey had not been seriously hurt. Even with an injured rib she could still ride. After my second drink I left the group and went to the tent I shared with my friend Neil and lay inside staring up at the canvas.

"I could be lying under that tree dead," I thought. "My dead body could have been slung on the back of a horse and carried back to camp. Or what if I wasn't dead? What if I was horribly hurt but alive? The guide wouldn't shoot me to put me out of my pain. What if, what if, what if..."

I got up and walked away into a grove of trees. I dug a hole in the pine needles and put my face into it and howled. I howled and howled and howled.



When I stopped howling I realized that my friend Neil was hunkered down beside me. "They said I'd better go see how you were doing. I went to the tent and you weren't there. But I saw you walking up here. So I followed you. Are you over it now?"

"Yes, I'm over it now," I said.

We walked down to the camp. Everyone was into the second pitcher of gin and vermouth. They were reeling, singing and shouting. It seemed they had forgotten about me entirely. I could have resented this. After all, I'd almost been crushed to death under a tree. Was that an occasion to jump around and sing and tell jokes and laugh? I was young. I wanted them to be serious. Wasn't this almost a tragedy? Why were they celebrating?

The cook came out of the cook tent wiping her wet hands on a white apron. Her daughters were behind her. She looked at my face and started laughing. "You are the funniest person I've ever seen!" she shouted. Then her daughters laughed with her. Since no one was taking the fact that I'd almost died seriously, I began to laugh with them. The laughter went on late into the night.

In those days I had a literary agent in New York City, an Austrian who had survived World War II. I don't know if he survived a concentration camp. Perhaps he did. He'd been through several kinds of hell and ended as an American citizen representing me as a writer when there was no money in representing me. In that sense he may have been the last of his breed. I wrote to him and told him that I'd almost been crushed under a tree. He replied, "You were spared. That means that every day for the rest of your life you must do something of value to others. Now you have a task. Begin today."

Ten months later he died. The person who bought his agency wrote to me and told me that she would represent me if I wrote a book similar to *Waiting for Mr. Goodbar*. I didn't think that I'd been spared in order to write another version of *Waiting for Mr. Goodbar*. I didn't want her to represent me. I'd represent myself, thank you. And that's what I've done.

Thirty-one years have passed. For a while I attended parties given by the Lahey's who live in a city fifty miles away. One of the women on the pack trip had been carrying a portable movie camera and she filmed the tree as it fell. She just sat there on her horse filming the meadow and when the tree began to fall and she caught it all on film. Then she dismounted and filmed it lying in the grass in the meadow. It was a very ugly tree, some kind of pine tree without needles. At a certain point in each party Mr. Lahey would show this film. Each time I saw the tree lying in the meadow it got uglier and meaner. After a while I stopped going to parties at the Lahey's.



But the last thing Ms. Lahey said to me before I vanished from their parties forever was, "None of us could have imagined that that tree could miss you. We were all behind you watching it fall and none of us thought it could possibly miss you. But it did."

"I poked Paint in the ribs with my knees," I said. "That's all."

Thirty-one years. That's a lot of days. That's a lot of days teaching, counseling, helping my students. That's a lot of love. That's a lot of weeks, months, years writing and publishing, hundreds of stories, poems and essays in hundreds of brave little magazines held together with a staple. There are six books, all my art, because I am an artist as well as a writer.

What have I learned from all this? Only that life is a comedy, not a tragedy. Come out of your cook tent and wipe your soapy hands on your apron and laugh uproariously. *For life's not a paragraph. And death I think is no parenthesis*





In the arteries of your trunk bring me together.
—*J. Daniel Beaudry*



THE TREES DON'T CARE

Kathy Kieth

about our usual argument over
whether you made us late, whether
I nag too much. As we whizz along
the freeway in our hot metal time
capsule, the grand old trees we pass
don't care—I doubt they even

notice (certainly they don't bother
to turn their heads) as I natter on
about this and that, and you
apologize for the forty-ninth time,
and we end up back where we started,
even at seventy miles an hour. But

the trees don't care at all. They just
lift their graceful armloads of blossoms
and toss them all over the stage, like
long-limbed ballerinas on opening night...





THE WHISPER OF TREES

Brody James

As a human, I watch time pass by; a cruel master in charge of handing us ecstasy, only to take it away in a measure of minutes. I witness that same master take a disastrous moment and make it last for an eternity within our hearts and minds. What is it that stays consistent in this world? Is it the steady rolling of the ocean on a calm summer day, the bloom of flowers, the ever-true awakening of insects every spring? Is it the leaves on trees changing from bright orange to red to yellow to brown indicating the arrival of fall, and then its departure as those same vibrant leaves die and fall to the ground, like a growing child, boy, man who must leave the embrace of home and go off on his own.

Trees are the signposts of consistency, the stalwart soldiers of changes that are to come. We can count on them to tell us what is ahead, and what we left behind. Those silent sentinels of our time, measuring the millennia in thick and thin layers of bark and integrity, growing stronger for every year they survive the ravages of that mean, unforgiving master, time. What stories lie within their rings? What secrets, what wisdom do they have to share with us? If we slowed our frantic pace and stopped to listen, we might hear the trees trying to tell us something. But no, we are too busy, too impatient, to concern ourselves with the whispering of trees.

Who am I to stand on this pedestal of grammar and tell you of the grandeur of trees? I am a hypocrite! I am a murderer of trees just by simply breathing, by being alive, because I *am* a writer. I stand as a symbol of the death of trees and I am ashamed of that byproduct of my craft. I am conscious of the damage I alone do, so I try in my small way to make up for my crimes. The words I write must be worthy of the paper they are written on. I am no judge of this, but yes, the heart that beats within my chest, the knowledge within my brain, they both are, and it is to *them* that I prove my worth on a daily basis.

So, in ending this, I give my pledge to the memory of trees. I will stay true to my task of living up to the high standards they have set for all of us, knowing that soon I shall be gone. Maybe in the millennia that follow, as the winds of time breeze through this aging world, my name will one day be heard in the whisper of trees.





Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them knows the truth.

—*Herman Hesse*



THE WILLOW TREE

Ellen Bihler

At the tree,
she elevated loneliness to art.
The exquisite, secret she!
Bowing branches like an inverted tulip,
piston and stamen; essence and substance,
became her.
Swaying in the currents of air,
its alien beauty engulfed her.

At the farthest corner of the yard,
detached from their squeezing presumptions,
the inner lattice of branches
was a conquerable challenge.
She sang there,
before she knew she couldn't sing.

Thin legs dangling above the world,
she straddled the Y of arms
as they embraced her smallness
into wholeness.





THE WITCHING TREE

Michael Cadnum

I killed him with the shotgun Dad had left us, the twelve-gauge hammer gun with the steel wire around the stock.

The old gun was so heavy I hated to carry it all the way into the woods, the burden too much for an eleven-year-old girl like me. I sometimes wandered over to the edge of the forest where I was forbidden to go, near the tree. The hunting was easy there. I often had luck bringing down game, giving deer both barrels when they showed up at the creek.

I never went all the way across the creek to the old white oak relic—never. No one dared to. Since all the other hunters were scared of the place, the wildlife four-footed through the undergrowth without a care. Everybody believed the ancient, burned out hulk of a tree could turn you into something—nobody knew what for sure—and that was enough to keep hunters from all over Lassen County from going anywhere close to it.

Stories had it that deer, chased up into its branches by hounds, turned into a horned, lashing creature and tore the pursuing dogs to shreds. Another, sadder tale described a father, mourning his lost daughter in pioneer days. The girl had shinnied up into the old giant playing hide and seek. A week later a hunter over in Truckee brought down an eagle with the semblance of the girl trapped within its plumage. People said her father climbed into the tree not long afterward, seeking to join her in oblivion. They say the owl that searches that night in the forest cried out a father's mournful song.

That was the story. There were others like them. I didn't believe these tales, exactly, but I didn't disbelieve them either. I kept well away from the tree.

I was sitting with my skirt up around my knees my bare feet dangling in Witch Creek, when the bear nosed out at me from the bracken fern, a dark brown animal, crashing through the creek, coming right at me. I thumbed back both hammers and leveled the gun. I gave the bruin both barrels just as he was standing up—he caught the hand-packed buckshot right in his pump.

He went down. I was so shaken I couldn't move, shivering and all but weeping with shock and relief. Then I tiptoed off through the woods to get the wheelbarrow I used for really big game. When I got the barrow to the woods I had to use a branch to lever the beast up and into it, already realizing he wasn't quite heavy enough to be a full-grown brute, just long and thin.



It was as I situated the carcass in the barrow that I saw the rip the shot made in his fur, and the gleam of what looked like silk and buttons. I told myself, Mary Lee, you are looking at the bear's insides and your imagination is playing tricks on what the heart and lungs look like all blown up the way they are.

I trundled the bear remains back home to the cabin with the pretty iron corrugated roof and the barn my dad fell off of when I was five years old. My dad was a legend to me, it seemed a half-century had gone by since he fell head first into the Model A Ford. Then my mother got the eye infection and when her vision went I just never went to school. The county never came to check on me, because of the hardship all over.

Mother said, "Mary Lee, you're breathing so hard you must have a buck the size of a heifer." I told her it was a yearling-sized bear and she knew from my voice there was something wrong.

"Are you hurt?" she said, peering through her blindness at the place where my raspy voice was coming from.

"No, but I killed a bear. I can't say what else I think I've done," I added.

I laid the carcass out and used my dad's old hunting knife and dressed the animal out they way you're supposed to. Mother staked the limbs out wide, tying them with rope so I could skin the fur clean, but I had to stop. I could not pretend I wasn't seeing what I was seeing—a young man in a suit with city shoes and gold cufflinks, wet with bear juice. A person the Witching Tree had turned into an animal.

My mother used her sense of touch to confirm what I was afraid to talk about, and her mouth got that tight look it gets when she had to tell me some thing bad. We pulled the wet, dead human body out of the bearskin. He was a slightly built, handsome young man with manicured fingernails and white teeth. His body was covered with bear-fluid and dead.

My mother was wiping his face with a hankie when we heard tires crackling up the dirt road from Highway Forty-Four. We rolled the hide up and dragged the injured young man into the barn barely in time.

They were the kind of men we got in those days up from Sacramento, or from as far away as San Francisco. Smooth men in suits and hats, flicking cigarettes into the brush and looking around at things without knowing what they were looking at. Usually they met carloads of smuggled scotch or hay trucks of bootleg gin, packed the contraband into their brand-new Chevrolets, and drove off.

But these two were not going anywhere, polite and soft-spoken. They wanted to know if we'd seen a man, "About this tall," said the freckled-faced man in the blue suit, indicating a person of short stature. "With a fresh pink face," he said.



My mother spoke in a rather fancy diction when she was nervous. She said she never entertained strangers, especially unfamiliar gentlemen, I translated into regular speech, saying, in plain English, "No." And I added, "And we don't want you here, either."

My mother made a tense hiss through her teeth, afraid my rudeness would make things worse.

The bald man in a brown suit stepped over to the mess the skinning had left on the pine needles, and said, "Jack, look at all this blood." He reached for my shotgun, leaning against the woodpile, and hesitated, like he was afraid it might go off accidentally.

"I bet he talked you into taking care of him," said the freckled man, smiling at me. He was still smooth-talking, but you could see his freckles go dark. "He's a bad man. We'll take him with us."

The bald man broke open the scatter-gun, and sniffed it. He could tell it had been fired not long ago. Then he tossed the firearm down and put one of his shiny city shoes right down on top of it. He took a pistol out of his suit pocket, a tiny little revolver like I'd seen in the movies at the Fox Theater in Red Bluff. Mr. Freckles took out his own little gun. An automatic like the kind you never see in real life, shiny with bluing, like a brand new gun that had never been used.

He cocked the gun, and Mother told me to run for the woods and not look back.

I ran.

On an ordinary day when you just go off along the edge of the woods, loaded for birds or squirrels you reach Witch Creek fast. You can see the hulk of the old stump off beyond the blackberry bushes, where you never want to wander.

But now that I wanted to get there quickly the distance was great, all the way along the abandoned pear orchard, past the sugar pines, and into the mesquite. The creek was deep where I tried to ford it, but I splashed through the water.

And then I was there.

The stump was shiny black inside where a lightning blast must have gouged out its heart during the Indian days, or even before. I was cold with fear for being so close to the place, and then realized that a man was injured because of me. I hurried right toward it the tree, and stepped into its quiet, dark interior.

I stood there in the Witching Tree as the change came over me.

My mother was on the porch, tear-stained.

The square faced man was prying at the barn door with a two-by-four. Mr. Freckles was sorting through the tools in the shed, extricating a crow bar as long as he was tall.



"Mary Lee," I heard my mother call. "Is that you?"

I took Mr. Freckles first, as he raised the crowbar to fend me off.

And then I turned my attention to the other one, the square-faced man squeezing off shots from his revolver, each wide and high. One blow and he was flat on his back, hurt and not going anywhere for a while.

She was calling my name as I turned to meet her milky gaze. My forepaws were bloody, and I wrapped myself around her protectively just as she started to scream.





Does a dragon still sing within a withered tree?
—*Dogen*



THE YEW TREE

Ellen Cooney

as the earth and the yew hold each other
like grandparents long entwined
down the long centuries they watch
each other renew themselves
the ancient earth like a lover guarding
the old yew in its second
millennium as its roots pull the
the trees apart as fissures deepen
and the crystal fragile heart is exposed
to battling jewels which slowly
rot it away forming a hollow
like opening new wine
the earth holds the yew
as a branch grows down the
hollow like star honey
and takes root as a new tree
and the earth watches as slowly
the new wood grows encasing
the old shell
century after century
millennium after millennium
the yew holding the earth's secrets
the earth holding the yew's





THREE AT THE TREES

Nina Gaby

After so many years my Hebrew had disintegrated causing me to miss the subtleties. Just one of the myriad of things I was ashamed of at that point in my life. There I was, back in Israel, volunteering at a kibbutz, complaining about the heat. One of the kids I worked with in the dairy kept talking about what sounded like "Three at the Trees", "Three at the Trees", and offered to take me there. Talking too fast as Israelis are wont to do, she seemed to be telling me that I would like it. A friend of hers, a boy, also working in the hot, dry ward where the dust was blinding and the cow mooing deafening, said yes, oh yes, the Americans always like it there. "Shalosh-et-ha-etzim." Let's go.

Crunching across the manure crusted fields in the heat of the mid-day Negev sun, they prattled on. Pieces of straw pierced my kibbutz-issue 'sandalim' and I kept having to stop to pull the brown chunks out from between my toes. "Rega! Rega!" I called to them, wait a minute for me.

There was little shade in the desert, and as we wove through the long lines of *pil-pel*, the pepper plants, I complained loudly that hell couldn't be much worse. They understood this, and laughingly told me "kadai, kadai"...it will be worth it. What I didn't understand was how anything could possibly be worth this trek in 110 degree heat through land that had even killed our biblical fore mothers and fathers who were used to it.

I was an out of shape 27 year old American who drank too much and was in the midst of emotional chaos. When I was eighteen, not much older than these kids, I had moved to Israel seeking solace, adventure, education. I had spent three years learning and forgetting Hebrew, finding and losing myself, and eventually went back to America. But when the intersection of love and life began to overwhelm me again, I returned to Israel, recalling a place of relative safety where hard work and passionate politics could redirect the self-absorption of even the most incorrigible of "drama queens" like myself.

"Henay! OK!" Ruti proclaimed.

Ido, always proud of his English, announced, "we have arrived." And there it was, "Three at the Trees."

Even Ruti and Ido quieted in deference to the darkened grove before us. A grouping of twisted, gnarled trunks circled a flattened area of long, dried leaves. I couldn't sort out at first what I was looking at. My sense of smell took over, I breathed deeply of some cool and cleansing scent. Eucalyptus. The straighter and taller of the grouping was a eucalyptus tree, the first I had ever noticed. Its silver fragrant leaves whispered in a breeze just moments before non-existent.



I had to stoop slightly to follow Ruti and Ido under what I later learned was a cypress, twisted and turned upon itself. They flopped down onto its roots. "Very nice here, yes?" they asked me.

"Oh yes."

Once my eyes adjusted to the blessed absence of light, I could trace the sculptural lines of an ancient olive tree. Perhaps the one remaining member of its desert family. What had it seen in its time? There were more than three trees here, but they had melded together into a cool outpost. I lay back onto the curling dry leaves that carpeted the floor of the little grove in hues of gray, brown, tan, ocher. Neutral desert colors. The sun twinkled way above where it couldn't reach us.

"There are more than three trees," I said to my companions. They murmured in agreement. "So why do they call it three trees?" They didn't seem to know.

"That is not what it is all about it," Ido said in a typically cryptic Israeli manner, mangling his syntax. I really didn't need to know any more.

I returned often, always alone after that first time, to "Shalosh-et-he-etzim." During the brutal *chamsee* winds, the hot sand filled terrors that sweep across the Negev, that was the only place where I could breathe. And then there were the quiet, reflective times when I knew I could discuss the mess my life had become with the eucalyptus, the cypress, the olive. They would not judge. They had seen it all before. I never knew what the other trees were called, but they'd been around as well. An American woman sitting under their branches, knees to chin, head on hands...was it any different than a lost Bedouin child in a previous century? Shelter is shelter.

The name of this place continued to puzzle me. Three what? People? Species? Wishes? Yes, maybe wishes. I had thought long and hard about that while in the respite and embrace of those trees.

To say my life had changed as a result of those thoughtful moments would be too dramatic. But there is action beyond wishing, once the desire has been established. The day before I left Israel for the last time, I filled my pockets with leaves from "Shalosh-et-ha-etzim." They dried out, as I did. Over my desk, as a grown-up finally, I have hung a small three dimensional puzzle, intricately jig-sawed in ocher and olive. A cypress tree. Or an olive, the actual species "is not what it is all about it." What is important is that when I inhale, half a lifetime later, I still smell the saving graces of Three at the Trees.





Walking through the woods I am reminded that
there is as much death here as there is life.
—*Mary Catherine Bateson*



TREE

Nancy Jean Carrigan

Perhaps it was an oak.
We did not notice such things
Dreaming away
 the last summer of childhood.

Jane and I shared its shade
With the fat black mare
Who was dreaming too
Of the foal stretching
Her sleek sides
 showing us our own futures.



Through the green haze
We watched white pictures
Painted on blue silk
Change in the lazy breeze
And talked of Prince Charming
or the hired hand—
 whichever came first.

They are gone now, tree
And childhood summer.
Houses filled with other lives
Stand in their place.
Two girls became two wives
Two mothers, two old women
 one a widow.



But what of the tree?
I hope it became
Turnings for a cradle's sides
Clean shavings for a new foal's stall
Flooring for a cherished house
Where Debbie and her friend
Are dreaming away
The last summer of childhood
And talking of Prince Charming
or the boy at Burger King—
whichever comes first.





TREE CLIMBING



Ardi Keim

Sitting at the forest's edge
You reached to me
And I remembered why I was born.
I stretched from rock to your arms
Limbs lifted me from earth
The maple tree, the fir.
Climb higher, you said
Reach for the sky, like my cousins and me.
Limber limbs. Strong and supple.
Bounce the spring of wind and sun dreams.
The life up here. The power
Strikes fear in the hearts of every mother.
Come down, you fool!
Keep climbing.
Bounce a little for the thrill.
Reach and pull higher still—for the fun.
Remember, I have opposing thumbs.
Lived here before.
Keep climbing.
 Four limbs in a hundred arms of safety
 No danger. Can't fall.
 I'm in a living thing.
 You love me.
 Oak and ash and alder.
 Remember when I faltered?
 You were there, a seedling.
 Now we swing and sing with wind and birdsong.
 So long from fall through winter.
 Now to spring again.
 Keep climbing.





Steps to sky and higher
In your loving arms.
Chestnut, beech and walnut.
Feed the feet that reach from earth to sky.
I climb the trees of reason.
Can you tell me why?
Our hands and limbs love sun and rain and wind.
Wave to lift the light hearts to the sky.
Up here I see forever.
The eyes of the horizon are upon me.
From earth to sky
Keep climbing.
 In a tree a child ever grows.
 Love of life—the sap within our limbs.
 I sing within your arms. We know.
 O climbing tree.
 A child ever growing in a tree





Trees are nature's
250 million years of joy!



TREE ROOTS

Nancy Jean Carrigan

The house on Gregory Street seemed smaller than we remembered it when we brought the children back to see where their lives had begun. But the elm, born not long before they, was a real tree now, spreading its shade on the patch of front lawn. Two spruce trees, planted at the birth of each child, had grown tall and straight. Caroline's, one set of branches taller, was just her height. Steve measured close to his, planted twenty months later.

Satisfied that their trees and their roots remained safe in Illinois soil, they piled into the car with us. "Let's eat!" Steve said. And we set off for the Student Union cafeteria for hot dogs and potato salad, our standard treat before Dad's Fulbright grant had taken us all across the Atlantic to Hamburg.

Later another trip took us past the little house. It was deserted in a street fallen on hard times. Hanging from one rusty hinge, the screen door skewed permanently open. The elm, a requirement of the GI loan that built the house, and home to a succession of wary cats escaping our cheeky dachshund, had succumbed to Dutch Elm disease. The children were crestfallen.

"Are you sure this is the place?" asked Steve.

"Our trees!" said Caroline. "Let's look in the back yard."

Together they rushed through the broken gate to the back yard where the spruce trees had stood. Two weathered stumps remained, half-covered by dandelions and chickweed. Their Christmas-tree perfection had probably been the downfall of the spruce. At least we hoped that each had ended life decked in lights and tinsel.

I saw the loss in my children's faces and remembered when I too tried to go back to where I began. The rambling white clapboard house with its lovely patch of spring violets had the world's best Bartlett pear tree growing next to Grandma's bedroom window. Many a time my brother and I had climbed out that window onto the porch roof to deprive the squirrels of its golden fruit. But tree, violets and house had been replaced by a parking lot.

Now from my bedroom window in another town, I watch moonlight turn the leaves of our ancient oaks to silver. Some of these old giants were seedlings the year our nation was born. They have seen it rip apart and heal again, survive depressions, go to wars, find peace and prosper. Houses with such history should be protected landmarks.



But how long will these living treasures be cherished? Will they be here to shade coming generations? Or will they have been sacrificed to parking lots, leaving only faded photographs like those by which my children's children will know the spruce and grandma's pear tree?

Will the tiny acorn sprouts I am encouraging through their baby years have the chance to become such majestic landmarks? They are safe with me. But in a moment, as oak trees measure time, their fate will pass to other hands. They will still be infants and vulnerable as children are.

Before I go to sleep, I ask whatever god took his eye off of those vanished trees to pay attention this time. To protect his tree children as I pray he will protect my human ones. Outside, moon-silvered leaves rustle in the night wind curling around the house—the sound of the whispering giants are adding their prayers to mine.





TREE SONG

Betty Lou Hebert

I wonder what it's like to be
A tall and graceful, living tree?
Rising to such glorious height.
Communing with the stars at night.
I walk around the massive base.
Against its bark, I press my face,
To see if I can feel the beat
Of pulsing roots, beneath my feet.
I listen to the swish and sigh
Of needled branches, lifting high
Above the ground. It seems to me
Eternity lives in a tree!





The forest is not merely an expression or representation of sacredness, nor a place to invoke the sacred; the forest is sacredness itself.

—*Robert Fulghum*



TREE SPIRIT

Marcia K. Matthews

I am the blasted apple
Struck by lightning
Left hollow
Still I go on flowering
And bearing fruit
Like there's no tomorrow





TREE SURGERY

Teresa Peipins

Plants are excused
the vagaries of passion
green is the key,
in palm tree paradise,
and outmoded army wear.
The answered prayer
lies in interlocked cells
busily transpiring.

I am the tree
you are the memory.
We chant as the priest
leads us where
the big oak stands
in all morning greenness.

One parishioner waves a saw.
Others squeal with delight.
We round the oak
spin faster and faster.
Our action secret
from no eye.
The priest scrambles up the scaffold
saws, dead limbs fall.
We catch them hurriedly.

The oak squeaks in the wind
as all decay is squarely burned.
The ease of removal astonishes
as we inspect our own limbs.
Finding them intact
under our breaths
we repeat the prayer.





No shade tree?
Blame not the sun but yourself.
—*Chinese Proverb*



TREE TALK

Vivian Demuth

A big black bear and two cubs
had hung around the firetower a week
feeding on fiery red bearberries.

One morning the mountain exhaled a breeze
Dandelion heads opened up, ecstatic in sunshine.
One cub nuzzled her mother's fur
shiny in the northern salmon sun.

The other cub, with white patch on forehead
nipped its sibling's tiny feet.

I decided to bring out my grizzly bear skull,
a gift given me by a park warden
after a female died
from a tranquilizer dart.

With bear skull in my lap, I sat down
on my cabin porch.

Suddenly, with bear skull exposed to the open air,
the pine tree I was looking directly at
started shaking furiously,
the only tree of two hundred in the yard
moving at all.

The gentle breeze still blew all across
the mountaintop
but somehow wind galloping like Pegasus
rapped against this lone crooked pine.

The mother bear walked over
and stood tall on hind legs
staring with dark eyes at the tree





as I watched, curious, amazed, and transfixed,
from the porch,
bear skull still in hand.
Who said bears had poor eyesight?
When the one-tree tempest stopped suddenly
as it had begun,
Mama Bear fell to the ground
feasting on sweet berries again and sniffing
in the direction of breathlessness.
Later I placed my bear skull long term
into that aging tree.
The bear and I—
we rise like a windstorm
from deep hibernations
to witness these old trees talk.





TREES



Jean Hollander

there was a cause in our discontent

or so we thought, chaining ourselves
to trees, the air less luminous,
timber wolf and bear gone north
to whelp on smatterings of ice

and we left to snowfall in May
and the thermometer warming—
a weak moon shone
into that pewter daylight

mountains became landslides
cover of fireweed, red and ferocious
not rooted to keep earth from rushing
down when the storm breaks

as wounds scar into healing
unwilling to recover
so trees once cut in Nantucket,
magnificent masts for schooners

could never grow again,
the wind free to howl
over laurel and twisted pine—
and for all our embracing

wood is our favorite shelter
walls, beds, fires, and coffins,
logs rushing flume-fall water
down to the whining blade.





Acts of creation are ordinarily reserved for gods and poets. To plant a pine, one need only own a shovel.

—*Aldo Leopold*



TREES

Paulette Licitra

1.

Trees
caught
rooted
in a spinning earth
will we ever
slow down
to release them?



2.

Trees—
antennas of the planet





TREES ARE LIKE US

Mark Gaffney

I treasure the old gray stumps
scattered here and there,
skeletons from the fifties
when the loggers high-graded this part of the valley,
plucking punkins on their first pass;

and I always trench around the aging relicts
before I run fire through my timber
—in spring or fall, about once every five years—
to preserve the story they tell
that rebukes our complacency.



The language of the rings
recorded in the basal area
is the history of the stand
—if you know how to read it—
site specific to this place.

Slowly the old giants crumble away,
dry rot eroding the outer flesh,
shell of cinnamon bark long gone,
but still sound at heart
and where fire worked its will upon the wood,
especially on the uphill slope where the fuel was heavy,
the charred and blackened boles like iron
where the flames hardened them,



the last fire plainly writ in the rings
of a green ponderosa almost fully girdled
in its youth, nearly a century ago,
a tale of a near thing—but not quite—and renewal,
as the resilient tree laid on new wood, year after year,
until the old wound was but a residual memory.





Authorized
Personnel
Only

Do trees have a sense of humor?



TREES IN SPRING

Zara Raab

Trees are bringing to the April light
The winter-long seed. Staunch, candid,
They lack our talent for deception,
And hide only their roots from our view.

Yet even their roots are not hidden.
Transparent, they appear—*by magic!*—
In the fragile leaves, flapping and
Wind-whirling and roiling the sky.

Detached from the stem, we stand by,
Hugging close our long winter cloaks.
Giants of the season just passed,
We wait first for a word from Spring
Before rising and passing by.





TRIUMPHANT RULER OF THE AFTERNOON

K. Ann Minto

In my quest to rule the day
And seize the world with my sight,
To the farthest top of the tree I'd climb
Swinging from branch to branch
Groping for a sturdy hold
on the slippery bark of a fragile limb,
Hidden behind clusters of pale green leaves,
that cling to the tall slim trunk.

Swaying precariously, half to the top,
Caught in the hold of a restless breeze
Not afraid, just cautious now
As girl and tree were yet too thin
to counter the force of a determined wind
That seeks to halt the quest begun
with crafty whispered promises.

And when the climb begins to falter,
Despairing of the journey's end,
I'd reach the top in triumphant laughter
To be cloaked in the blue of the waiting sky
And the sun would crown my victory
A golden wreath upon my brow
As I surveyed the world, conquered, below
A kingdom before my sight,
Where I dared to rule the afternoon
with the sigh of the wind in the tree.





The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago.
The second best time is now.
—*Anonymous*



TWO TREES

Carol Wade Lundberg

Two trees heavy
with fruit
on the slope
of a small yard:

Magenta and cloudy
yellow, they are
not bruised lips, flesh
colored moons, or

any other projection
of personal history—just
two plum trees

heavy
with fruit
side by side
in a small yard.

Beautiful.





UNTITLED

Madeleine Marie Slavick

Tree, tree, stand
inside
me





To return to my own trees, I went among
them often, acknowledging their presence
with a touch of my hand against their trunks.
—*Ruskin Bond*



UPON FINDING A 200 YEAR OLD TULIP POPLAR

Robert L. Tener

In the rainy woods
we meet unexpectedly;
awed by your size
my eye unconsciously
measures your board feet.
You lean down close
touch me with
your flowering branches;
your wet white perfume
stirs embryonic memories
latent in us; we both
emerged from the sea
to blossom across the land
but you were first.
I will guard your privacy,
tell no one I found you
lest you be downed
and quartered for
lumber or trim; you
and I have age in common,
not a retirement shelter.





WAITING

Jessica Shen

We stood there,
Me with my little bucket
You in your spring dress,
Ready to pick apples.

Under curving boughs
Of our two old apple trees,
We gazed in longing
At fruit laden branches,

And together reached up.

Filling our buckets,
We stole a few just for us.
With juicy lips we laughed
In the warm sun.

You left me in spring;
The trees waited in fall,
But you never returned.
I go to the store for apples,

And the trees endure at home.





Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.
—*Joyce Kilmer*



WATER OAK

Gary Hanna

Dry leaves
hang on trees,
sing
to the winter wind.
They will see the snow,
taste
the coming spring,
settle softly
in the rising grass
to make their point.
Their legacy,
unlike mine
is a selfless art,
sustainment
is its form,
where habitat
is just one place
and roots go down,
deep down,
hold the river back.





WHAT THIS MEANS, BEING COTTONWOOD

Kathleen Cain

Stand near the river with your feet
slightly apart. Push your toes down
beyond the mud, below the water.
Stretch arms and head back
deliberately, until straight lines
no longer matter—until the sky
from any angle is your desire.

Let the skin go grey and split open.
If you die a little somewhere
the wind will carve the branches back
into an alphabet
someone will try to remember
how to read. Stay this way

half a century or more, turning leaves
in the half-note tides of the air.
Inside, with that blood so slow
no one hears it, set buds for spring
by each late October.
November, December, dream what it means
being owl...or star.





There is always Music amongst the trees in the Garden, but our hearts must be very quiet to hear it.

—*Minnie Aumonier*



WHEN A TREE
GOES ON
VACATION

Mario Milosevic

it doesn't exactly
get away from
it all. It's

more a case of
dropping its burdens
leaf by leaf and

planting its roots
deeper, mirrored
in the sky. Trees

get frequent flier
miles but never
use them. Instead

they pass them
on to visiting
birds, a trembling

branch their only
souvenir of
a good time.





WHIFFLE BALL TREES

Kenneth Pobo

Today is cold and wet. December crawls under my skin, seizes me. I make hot chocolate, take it to the window to spy on my back yard. Squirrels still do jigs. The feeder's empty—time to buy more suet.

My yard has four trees, all empty. I like their stark outlines. Even the wind's blade can't cut them. A wimp, I pull a blanket over my shoulders, admire—from a distance, with heat on.

The four trees remind me of four trees in the back yard of the house where I grew up. Villa Park, Illinois. Baseball cards in bike wheels. Cock Robin for lime ice cream cones. MacDonald's dunk cups. Ben Franklin's penny candy.

Trees often make us think of summer shade or raking piles to jump in, or when older, bagging them for trash dudes. I think of those things too, but also of baseball. Three of those four trees—a cherry, a Chinese elm, and an apple—served as first, second, and third bases. My friends and I would bam a whiffle ball and scam for the trees.

A whiffle ball whistles when it corkscrews out from a bat, carries dents with dignity. A thin yellow bat has no conscience. RUN!

Off we'd go, clutching the apple tree for a stumbling single. We declared homers if we hit high into the Chinese elm's branches. The tree's green mitt briefly held the ball before letting it plop down, sometimes on one of our crewcut heads. The other kind of homer came when we would hit it over the fence beyond my dad's grapes. That meant a quiet trip into a neighbor's yard.

Often the cherry was the most fun. In spring, when it became white confetti, if we got a triple or tried to steal third a white blossom shower fell. Pockets of our short-sleeve shirts caught petals.

My friend Greg and I invented the cherry game, a far cry from whiffle ball. We'd collect a dozen or so ripe cherries, pretend they were people injured in a horrible accidents, do instant heart surgery—resetting the stone in the wounded cherry, rubbing dirt on it, a new kind of skin.

Those few cherries we got—and the many the crows got—still left enough for a couple of great pies. The apple tree bore fruit for a few years then the crop sputtered and stopped.

We had one more tree—behind the garage, out of the playing field, a tulip tree. Strange blossoms, hardly like tulips, but in its early years they raised gentle cups right up to the sky.

All four trees are gone.



I'm in Pennsylvania, but my parents still live in that house. Other trees have come. Some have also gone. Sometimes when I watch a baseball game, I don't see wealthy players running before sharp cameras. I see trees. Kids. A whiffle ball caught by leaves and dropped with a boink on our summer heads.





It is difficult to realize how great a part of all that is cheerful and delightful in the recollection of our own life is associated with trees.

— *Wilson Flagg*



WILD CHERRY

Joan I. Siegel

Each spring the wild cherry
hangs like a white cloud outside
your bedroom window
and you forget the winter months

when it stood frozen in feet of snow
the rotted nests of finches clinging
and silent of the humming of bees
the too sweet smell of flowers

that seeps into memory and stings
deep in the flesh to make you
homesick for another place that is
not a place at all but an earlier

time when it was simply enough
to open your eyes in the white shade
of a cherry tree in full bloom
and feel blessed.





WILLOW NURSERY

Robens Napolitan

The sky space the willow once danced in is empty.
It lies on the ground, sprawled in three ripped directions.
Fingertips of new green on slender whips reach upward,
careful not to tangle with each other and ask for more trouble.

Small branches have been cut and stuck in the ground
around the reclining giant like children at their mother's knee.
It's obvious that someone hopes to root more willows here
where it floods every spring with cold mountain melt-off.

As I watch this nature drama, having no part
to play other than passerby, I root for the willow
and its continued life, and now for its offspring
just starting to leaf out and wave in the wind.





As Americans, we have become comfortable with our environment of concrete, steel, plastics, and artificial fibers, colors, and flavorings to such a degree that many question whether or not we even need to focus on a relationship with creation. We have lost the desire to seek God and the ability to see God in all things. And perhaps, we have closed our eyes to the importance of God's creation as expressed through forests because we have substituted the wonders of human creation for the wonders of God's creation. This form of idolatry should concern us.

—*Susan Drake*



WINTER TREE
Jacqueline Marcus

It was not quite dark
where the slender tree leaned
into the blue night,
alone in the field,
and even the birds were absent.

It was holy, really,
to be sharing the open space
with that one tree,
no one around for miles—
a thin snow
drifting down on both of us,
expecting nothing,
and no one expecting
a thing in return.



"Coffee," I blurted. "I need lots of strong coffee. And something to eat." The clerk pointed to a frozen meat pie glowing iridescent green in the display case illuminated by a sickly flickering neon light.

"Do you want it heated?"

"No, I want it right now," I demanded, suddenly overcome by sharp edges of hunger, unwilling to wait, realizing that the pie was really not green. It was just the reflection from the lighting in the streaky display case. He shrugged carelessly, took out the pie and pointed to a self-service coffee stand. Then he went back to his newspaper, popped a piece of gum into his mouth, leaned against the counter and slowly opened the paper to the sports section.

Yes, he was the same clerk. The one I saw half a year ago. Even the same stained checkered shirt. Did he recognize me? I saw no sign of that. We were alone in the Breezy Market. But there was nothing breezy here, nothing lively. Nothing elegant, or even pretty. Everything here sagged, drooped or was nailed down at wrong angles. The shelves were uneven. They sagged crookedly under the weight of Del Monte pineapple cans, Del Monte ketchup bottles, beaten up cans of tuna and squat jars of instant coffee.

"When did they cut the tree?" I asked. "My tree," I whispered under my breath.

"About two months ago," he looked at me sullenly, then yawned exposing yellowing teeth.

"Why?"

"Rotten. Old." He picked up a toothpick, twirled it in his mouth, picking the spaces between his front teeth with great deliberation. His eyes were glazed over, opaque. What did he see?

"Rotten. Old. That's all. Just rotten?"

I looked for signs of sadness in him. A tear in the corner of his eye. A sag of shoulder, a droop of jaw, a sigh. A word other than "rotten" and "old." After all, the tree had shaded the Breezy Market, protected it from the scorching summer sun, dappled it with filigreed shadows. He had lived under its splendid canopy. But he sat glued to his newspaper, sucking on his toothpick, oblivious of me and my grief.

The scalding realization that people do not cry or whimper for someone else's sorrow made me hate him, the kind of turbulent hatred one can afford to feel for a stranger whom you will never see again. I found myself loathing his thick swampy nonchalance, his stained shirt, unbuttoned over a fleshy stomach. I was offended by the gap of milky white porcine flesh overflowing the belt, the missing buttons on his shirt.



It had been late July when I first saw the tree. A hot shimmering day. I had some business to transact in Clayton and was about to return home. I turned a wrong corner and saw the eucalyptus, standing in a grove, rearing its head high above the rest. It stood close to the Breezy Market, spreading its weepy foliage, almost engulfing the ramshackle building. I stopped the car and stared. Strains of a long forgotten song splashed in my head. "Ding ding ding went the bell, zing zing zing went my heartstrings. Then I started to know how it feels when the universe reels." I staggered out of the car and walked toward the tree. The leaves shook. I heard them fall. Zing zing, the grove sang.

As I got closer I saw it was riddled by disease and bent with age, its pods spotted with varicose veins. I walked around its gigantic circumference, sniffing its pungent smell, running my hand against the rough and craggy bark, which reminded me of a favorite puppy's feverish tongue. Its feathery leaves cascaded down on me, bringing memories of billowing curtains, soft against my cheeks on a hot summer night. I picked up a handful of pods, my senses assailed by the perfume of camphor. I remembered soothing hands applying camphor to my forehead when I had a fever as a child. Sensations from the past joined the present. I seemed to be moving outside time, present and past holding hands like a loving couple. I looked down at my watch. Only a few minutes had passed.

With pounding heart I embraced the tree, licking the bitterness of its ancient skin, not even looking around to see if I was being watched. I rubbed my hands against the tree, signing, like a blind person, words of love.

At the museum across the street, that day in July, they told me that the tree did not have long to live. They called it The Great Eucalyptus and said it had been planted by the founder of Clayton, one Joel Clayton, sometime in the 1840's. A placid plump volunteer at the museum handed me a brochure that said when Joel Clayton first laid eyes on the valley he said it was "love at first sight." In his travels he had brought the seedling from Australia and planted it in his beloved valley.

Like Joel Clayton, I too was smitten by the beauty of the valley and the seedling now full grown. The tree would live forever, I told myself. It had strength. It had beauty. It had Joel Clayton's love. And now it had mine. It was invincible. The volunteer obviously did not know what she was talking about. Death was not on my agenda when my heartstrings zinged.

I walked back to the tree and under its protective canopy I felt like a well-cradled lover—soothed, refreshed and renewed. Downtown Clayton disappeared in a foggy mist. Was this a moment or a lifetime? An equation: a space-time = a new word, a new invention came to mind. Whatever it was, it felt richly complete, vibrant and zesty. It occurred to me, as I stood there, that I needed never to return, to make commitments, to vow "forever." This was forever. It was exhilarating to think I could carry this



memory untarnished, untouched by ravages of time, close to me. It could glow, like a beacon in the deep recesses of my mind.

I was wrong.

One dull grey November day I felt a sudden urge to revisit the beloved. Memory alone was not nourishing enough. I needed replenishment, reinforcement. Sliding into downtown Clayton, faded and sweet as remembered, I drove around the back way, so as not to make a precipitous frontal attack. I wanted to surprise the tree, ease in, tiptoe into the encounter, savor the sensuality of postponement like a slow melting ice, and face the brightness of its existence in incremental steps.

My heart was a beating hammer in my chest. There was the Museum—closed this day. The old Clayton Blacksmith Shop, the old jail, the courthouse. All there. Breezy Market, shabby and squalid as ever. The grove of eucalyptus trees stood like sentinels in a row. A breath-sucking shyness pervaded me as I came toward my tree. Demurely I lowered my eyes, giddy with love, trembling with anticipation.

Gone! The Great Eucalyptus was gone. The rest stood silently, heads bowed as if bearing witness to the death of a peer. A sudden breeze spun the grove into a hum, a song I decipher but which left me shivering. Where the beloved had once stood there now was a gnarled stump, bleeding its ragged wounds. Slivers of wood were scattered at the base like shorn hair unswept by a beautician.

Pods huddled together, crushed by an unseen army of boots. Churning rage boiled up in me. True, the tree was not in the bloom of youth, not in the best of health, but it had been in the prime of age and I was not prepared for its demise. Its blatant disfigurement tore at my heart. Age is to be revered, not trampled on.

There were no mourners. No eulogies. No rose petals strewn at its feet. Just a stump. Only the other trees, heads bowed, bearing witness. Men are buried even in battle. Bodies are brought back home at great expense, crossing oceans, arriving flag-draped to be given a proper burial. Bugles are sounded.

Here in Clayton all was quiet. An ordinary day. Why had my tree, crossing oceans many years ago as a supple seedling, been left so unceremoniously, so ungrieved. I could hardly bear to look at its wounded nakedness. Reduced from a majestic height it was now merely a low-lying stub.

"Didn't anyone do anything about the tree? Save a branch at least?" I asked the clerk. The words, thunderously loud in my head, came out as a whisper. I wanted to yell, "After all, it was the tree that gave this ridiculous ugly building some class—without it you are just any rundown seedy establishment, in the middle of nowhere." The words aborted in my mouth. The clerk, yawning, scratching his belly, moved his toothpick up and down between his lower teeth. He stared at me with opaque eyes, picked at a pimple on his cheek. "The tree was old, had to go," he said turning back to his sports page.



I grabbed the pie and drink and rushed out to my car. The hot coffee seared my throat. The pie was frozen solid and I threw it into a nearby metal trash can. The sky now was a brutal grey and gusts of wind spit leaves in a St. Vitus dance.

In the car I told myself that it was a very old tree. It was time for it to go. I tried to comfort the loss, to pack it in ice, to isolate it. After all, it was just a quick love, a brief encounter. A half hour. Thirty minutes at most.

But there are moments in one's life, minutes, sometimes seconds, that glow like brilliant fireflies in the dark, their offshoot sparks settling in the sinews of one's being. They become part of the muscle and fiber of memory, an event that has no past and no future except in the mind where it will live fresh forever. In the landscape of the memory everything gets heightened. In the palace of the heart events are untouched by reality—no paling of the bloom.

An earthquake lasts at most ten seconds, yet the slightest tremor, a falling book, a heavy step, can evoke the feeling of terror once again. So it can be with cataclysmic brief, even unreciprocated love. Who can forget the zing zing zing of the heartstrings? From now on any giant eucalyptus, any sweet seedy downtown, filigreed shadows on a ramshackle building, any hot shimmering July day, may conjure up a hammering of my heart. Love of any duration is a soaring object, diving deep inside and flying high above, a luminescent property spreading magic dust.





Zing, Zing, Zing!



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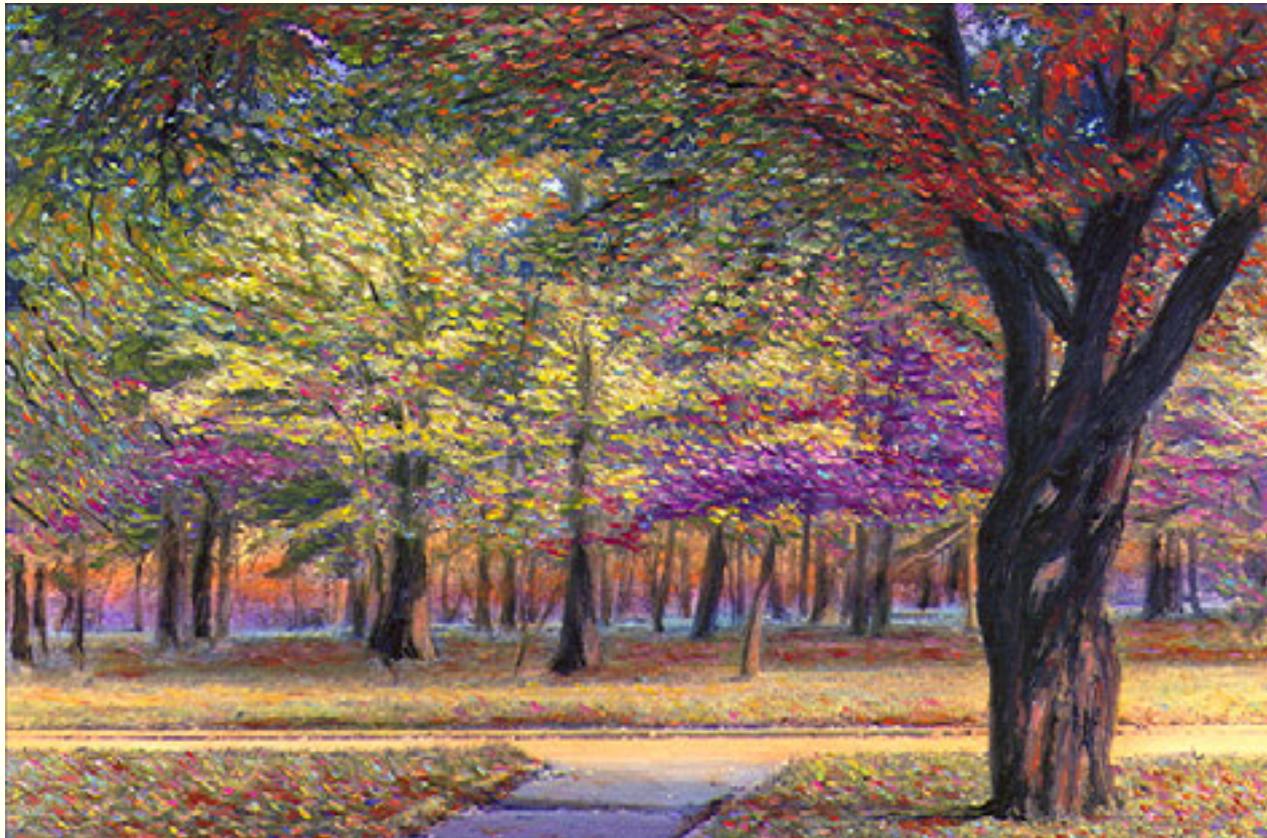
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Autumn Splash



ENDNOTE

***Now is the time for all good people
to come the aid of trees, forests and the wilderness.
—Jackie Hofer***

Kenyan ecologist, Wangari Maathai, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. She is the first African woman to receive the peace prize since 1901. During the 1970s, she initiated the Green Belt Movement to plant several million trees throughout Africa to help deal with the increasing destruction of native forests. For Mrs. Maathai, who is known as The Tree Woman in Kenya, the prize came out-of-the-blue, "This is extremely encouraging to the people of Africa and African women," she said. "It is the recognition of the many efforts of African women, who continue to struggle despite all the problems they face."

Teresa Mese, Student Body President of the High School in Fort Morgan, Colorado responded to a Memorial Tree Planting Ceremony celebrating 111 early pioneers and tree enthusiasts of the Fort Morgan area. She wrote, "The tree can also be related to society. A green-topped, abundantly branched, strong tree must have used all of its resources to become the great tree that it is. For a society to become strong, it, too, must have the uniting characteristic of the tree. It must use all its resources, the whole of men, to become complete. The branches could symbolize the total prosperity of the people within the society, and the trunk, the leaders within the society who hold the people and their ideals together."

Words, photographs and paintings are not trees. A tree is a living being. Some trees live for thousands of years. If it weren't for the trees, we would not be here. We owe it to them and to ourselves to make certain there are enough trees, native forests and wilderness areas left to sustain life on earth. Hopefully, even those who deny the facts of global warming will come to their senses before it's too late for ourselves and those of future generations.

Internet links to organizations that help protect national forests and wilderness areas, and provide information on responsible planting, conservation and harvesting of trees, can be accessed from the SunShine Press Publication's website at: www.sunshinepress.com

***What we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror
reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another.
—Mahatma Gandhi***





ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tom Absher has two books of poetry: *Forms of Praise*, Ohio State University Press, 1981; *The Calling*, Alice James Books, 1987; and a chapbook, *The Invisible Boy*, The Writers Voice, 1998. A book of essays, *Men and the Goddess*, came out with Park Street Press in 1991. He was a YMHA/Nation Discovery winner in 1978 and has received two NEA Poetry Fellowships and a Fellowship from the Vermont Council on the Arts.

Mary Kate Azcuy's poetry has been published in literary and academic journals and anthologies, as well as local and regional newspapers and magazines. Her play, *The Storytellers*, was part of the 1994 Gallatin at La Mama Young Playwrights Festival at New York University. She teaches English at Monmouth University in New Jersey.

Jeffica Barnes is a freelance writer in Rochester, New York. In 1998, she received a B.A. degree in English with a focus in technical writing.

G. S. Bauman was raised in Chicago, received a B.A. from the University of Chicago and an M.A. from Governors State University. She is a sculptor, painter, gardner, and has been interested in writing prose and poetry from an early age.

Rachel Baumgardner was born in the rolling, wooded hills that surround Lake Huron. Her father is a retired high school English teacher and her mother is a recovering literature professor, turned CEO. Rachel is not ashamed to admit that she was spoiled growing up in this scenery and with these role models. She is a senior at Ohio Northern University and looks forward to graduate school.

Sandra Marek Behringer was born in Blue Island, Illinois and grew up just south of Chicago. The Midwest is her ground and much of her poetry has been written in her head while traveling its highways and back roads.

Karen Benke is the author of *Sister*, Conflu: X Press, 2004. Her poems have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Santa Clara Review*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *The Ledge*, online at *Poetry Daily* and elsewhere. Poems are forthcoming in *americas review*, *Poetry East*, *Pilgrimage*, and *Runes: A Review of Poetry*. She teaches in the California Poets in the Schools.

Henri Bensussen has been published in various journals and anthologies, including *Blue Mesa Review*, *Eclipse*, and *Sinister Wisdom*. Once she wanted to live in Bandon but moved instead to the northern coast of California, where she gardens, watches birds, and sometimes writes.

Richard Heifetz Bernstein has lived on the West Coast from Northern Baja to British Columbia. His book *Sunboys Amazing Discovery* is available through ABE Books and Amazon.

Ellen Bihler is a registered nurse, working with severely handicapped children. Her work has appeared in *California Quarterly*, *Buckle &*, *Square Lake*, *Poetry Motel*, and elsewhere. She lives in New Jersey.



Lyn Bleiler is a freelance writer and published poet living in northern New Mexico. Her work has appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies including Women Celebrate, *Peace Publications*, 2003 and Voices and Visions of Taos: An Anthology of Artists and Writers, *Wild Embers Press*, 2004.

Imogene Bolls is professor emerita and former poet-in-residence at Wittenburg University, Ohio. She retired early and moved to Taos to write. Author of three poetry books and more than 600 poems in national journals and anthologies, she counts among her honors two Ohio Arts Council grants and the Ohioana Poetry Award.

Jeannette Cabanis-Brewin's poetry has been published in *The Nomad*, *Atlanta Review* and *Appalachian Heritage*. She was a finalist in the Atlanta Review's Poetry 2000 competition and in the 2000 Greensboro Awards. Three of her poems have been accepted for a forthcoming anthology about mothers and daughters, edited by Marilyn Kallet of the University of Tennessee. She is also author of a forthcoming chapbook, My Seen Creed, published by *St. David's Episcopal Church*.

Barbara Brooks has published fiction and nonfiction in *Glimmer Train*, *Writer's Digest*, *Inkwell*, *Prima Materia*, *The Ledge* and elsewhere. Her MFA is from Bennington College. She lives in New York on a wooded acre.

Simone Poirier-Bures is the author of three books: Candyman, a novel set in her native Nova Scotia; That Shining Place, an award-winning memoir of Crete; and Nicole, short narratives about growing up female and Acadian. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies and more than 30 journals in the United States, Canada, Australia, and England. She teaches at Virginia Tech and is working on a series of nature essays and a travel memoir about Kyrgyzstan.

Evelyn A. Buretta was born on a farm in the village of Lively Grove, Illinois, the place of her tree encounter. After completing a career as a technical writer in California's Silicon Valley, she has returned to her Midwestern roots and now resides in Missouri.

Michael Cadnum's twenty-eighth book, The Dragon Throne, will be published by *Viking* in the summer of 2005.

Kathleen Cain's poems have appeared in several literary magazines and anthologies. She is a contributing editor for *The Bloomsbury Review* and is currently doing research for a book about cottonwood trees. **Poem 1 Poem 2**

Candace Calsoyas is an organic tree farmer in Santa Cruz. She lectures at UC Santa Cruz and has just returned from Asia where she taught literature and film aboard the Golden Bear Training Ship.

Carol Carpenter's poetry and fiction has appeared in over 150 publications such as *Yankee*, *America*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Barnwood*, *Indiana Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Byline*, *Confrontation* and various anthologies. She just completed a CD, Poetry Harmonium, which puts poetry to music. She received many awards, including the Richard Eberhart Prize for Poetry.



Nancy Jean Carrigan is a prize-winning poet, artist and novelist. She lives with her husband in the remnant of an Illinois oak savanna. The venerable trees share the woods with a small Colorado spruce which celebrates granddaughter Brooke's birth. **Poem Story**

Dane Cervine's work has recently appeared in journals such as *Eclipse*, *Freshwater*, *Raven Chronicles*, and *Porter-Gulch Review* among others. His writings are included in two recent anthologies: *To Love One Another: Poems Celebrating Marriage*, *Grayson Books*, and *Working Hard for the Money: America's Working Poor in Poem & Story*, *Bottom Dog Press*. He serves as Chief of Children's Mental Health in the Santa Cruz, California area.

Kent Clair Chamberlain's first prophetic poem, *Prayer for the Modern Age* was written when President Kennedy took office: "Forgive us, the assassins/ For we lack Thy Mercy." He attended Southern Oregon College.

Jessica Tina Chang has won several awards, including First Place in the America Library of Poetry and the American Literacy Council's *With One Voice* contest in October 2003 for *Farewell*. For her poem, *Sequel in Iraq*, she received the 2004 President's Award for Literary Excellence and second place in the Summer 2003 Iliad Literary Awards Youth Program. She attends Yale University and hopes to double major in English and Music.

Brent Christianson lives in Wisconsin where he is the director of the Lutheran Campus Center. He enjoys gardening, cooking, dancing and canoeing in the Boundary Waters of Minnesota,.

Vivina Ciolli has won prizes and fellowships to colonies where writing is her focus. Poetry is her true love. *Bitter Larder* won the 1994 *New Spirit Press Chapbook Competition* and *Consolation of Dreams* won at *Talent House Press* in 2001. She is a retired educator and enjoys her four cats.

Kirby Congdon got his early literary bearings writing about machines in the city, his background is rural Connecticut where his family planted some 50 pine trees on his great-grandfather's one-horse farm simply out of their love for the idea. As a poet, he has had encouragement and admiration from e.e. cummings, Marianne Moore, Gregory Corso and Quincy Troupe.

Gabriel Constans has written for numerous newspapers, magazines and journals in North America, Europe and Asia. Seven of her books have been published in the United States, including *Heart Shadows*, *Adventure Books, Inc.* 2000; *Beyond One's Own*, *Crossquarters Breeze*, 2001; and *Sin-Full Chocolate Smoothies*, *Avery Penguin Putnam*, 2002.

Ellen Cooney has six books of poetry published by *Doir Press*, San Francisco. Her poem, *The Yew Tree*, is from a book of poems about trees still in progress.

Deborah Gordon Cooper's poems have appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies. She is the author of three chapbooks of poetry. Deborah and her husband Joel, a visual artist, regularly exhibit collaborative images.



Anne Coray lives at her birthplace on remote Qizhjuh Vena (Lake Clark) in southwest Alaska. Her poetry has appeared in *The Southern Review*, *North American Review*, *Commonweal*, *Poetry* and other publications. She has several chapbooks, including *Ivory*, *Anabiosis* and *Soon the Wind*, *Finishing Line*.

Renée E. D'Aoust treasures her family's stewardship forest in Idaho where she works with the land while also writing about the process. In 2004, she received the Nicholas Sparks Fellowship to attend the University of Notre Dame's MFA program.

Tony D'Arpino's latest book is *Greatest Hits 1969-2003* from *Pudding House Press*. An excerpt from his novel *St. Bonaventure's Island* appeared in *Terra Incognita* (Madrid). His recent poems appeared in *Poetry East*, *Penumbra*, and *Rio*.

Todd Davis has appeared in such journals and magazines as *The North American Review*, *River Styx*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Poetry East*, *Many Mountains Moving*, *Natural Bridge*, *The Nebraska Review*, *Yankee*, *Flyway*, *The Red Cedar Review*, *Appalachia*, *Blueline*, *Southern Indiana Review* and *The Worcester Review*. His first book of poems, *Ripe*, was published by *Bottom Dog Press* in 2002. Some poems from *Ripe* are anthologized in *Visiting Frost* (Univ. of Iowa Press, 2005).

Ellen Kitzes Delfiner is a former New York City educator and has been writing for over twenty years. Her writing has appeared in magazines such as *Wind*, *Aura*, *Slant*, and *Response*, among others.

Vivian Demuth is a poet and fiction writer who has appeared in literary journals and anthologies in the United States and Canada. Her summers are spent as a forest service lookout. She also works with New York's homeless. Her poetry chapbook, *Breathing Nose Mountain*, was published by *Long Shot Productions*, 2004.

Janice DeRuiter lives in the San Francisco Bay area where her favorite tree lives on an ancient bluff overlooking the sea. She received her MFA in Creative Writing and literature at Mills College. Her work has appeared in several anthologies and journals including *Women and Death: 108 American Poets*, *Ground Torpedo Press*. Most recently her work appeared in *New Works Review*.

Cynthia Drew's short stories have appeared in *Mountainhead Magazine* and in the 2004 *New Century Voices* anthology. She participates in the University of North Carolina's Great Smokies Writing Project and published the poetry chapbook, *Gas, Food and Lodging*.

Margarita Engle is a botanist and the Cuban-American author of two novels, *Singing to Cuba*, *Arte Público Press* and *Skywriting*, *Bantam*. Her short fiction and poetry have appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Bilingual Review*, and *California Quarterly*. Her most recent book is a collection of haiku, *Dreaming Sunlight*, *Feather Books*, U.K. Her literary awards include a San Diego Book Award and a Cintas Fellowship. She lives in central California, where she and her family enjoy hiking and volunteering for a wilderness search-and-rescue dog training program.



Cathryn Essinger's first book of poetry, *A Desk in the Elephant House*, won the Walt McDonald First Book Award from Texas Tech University Press. Her new work has appeared in *Mid-American Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Poetry Magazine's 90th Year Anthology*.

J. Glenn Evans is a poet, novelist and historian with three books of poetry: *Windows in the Sky*, *Seattle Poems* and *Buffalo Tracks*. He has written several community histories, history of Sweden, two local biographies, and the novel, *Broker Jim*. He is the recipient of 1999 WPA Faith Beamer Cooke Award and 2003 Seattle Free Lances Outstanding Writer Award. His work appears in numerous literary journals including *PoetsWest*, *Poets Table Anthology*, *Vintage Northwest*, *4th Street*, *Writers in Performance Anthology*, *Poets Ink*, *Raven Chronicles*, *Square Lake*, and *The Open Door*.

Malaika Favorite's book of poetry, *Illuminated Manuscript*, was published by *New Orleans Poetry Journal Press*, 1991. Her poetry has appeared from 1994-2003 in *Visions International*, *Xavier Review*, *Louisiana English Journal*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Big Muddy*, *Pen International*, *Art Papers*, *Sage*, and *African American Review*.

David Feela is a poet, free-lance writer, writing instructor, book collector, and thrift store pirate. He is a contributing editor and columnist for *Inside/Outside Southwest* and *Four Corners Free Press*.

Irene Ferraro was born in NYC, in the borough of Brooklyn. In the big city, nature is a precious living thing, because there is so little of it and she respects its fragility. Poetry is essential to her as she has been writing since early childhood. She recently married Ronald Sives and is also known as Irene Ferraro-Sives.

Frank Finale is the poetry editor of *the new renaissance* and co-editor, with Rich Youmans, of the anthology, *Under a Gull's Wings*, *Down the Shore Publishing*, 1996. His *To the Shore Once More, Vols. I & II*, *Jersey Shore Publications*, 1999 and 2001, containing his essays, poems and the reproduction of paintings by New Jersey artists, were regional best-sellers. He recently retired from teaching in the Toms River Regional Schools as "Teacher of the Year." His story *Legends of a Tree* appeared in *Tree Stories*, *SunShine Press Publications*, 2002.. **Story Poem**

Jim Fisher is a Wallace Stegner Fellow in poetry at Stanford University. His poems have appeared in print journals including *Snowy Egret*, *Icarus*, *Processed World*, *Avocet* and *The Peralta Press*, and online at *Salon.com*, *Red River Review*, *Terrain* and *DIAGRAM*.

John Fitzpatrick received the 2003 Hackney Literary Award in Poetry; First Place, *Confluence*; National Honors, *City Works*; Editor's Choice, *Mad Poets Review*, and a Vermont Studio Center poetry residency. His 2000 NYU, Ph.D. dissertation dealt with the poet as creator and as reader responder, with poets Barbara Unger and Michael Burkard participating in his research. Earlier manuscripts were accepted by *Aspen & Bread Loaf Writers' Conferences*.

Jeremy Frey was born and raised on the Gulf Coast of Florida and currently resides in Arizona's Sonora Desert. Holding an MFA in Poetry from the University of Arizona, he is now completing work in Creative Nonfiction. He most recently spent time in the presences of *straight swaying pine* along the Baltic Sea, in Klaipeda, Lithuania. Frey is a founding member of the Burnt Possum Poets.



Alice Friman's new work appears in *Southern Review*, *Boulevard* and others. Her latest book, *Zoo*, University of Arkansas Press, 1999, won the Ezra Pound Poetry Award from Truman State University and the Sheila Motton Prize from the New England Poetry Club. She has received fellowships from the Indiana Arts Commission, the Arts Council of Indianapolis, and the Bernheim Foundation, and was the winner of the 2002 James Boatwright Prize from *Shenandoah*.

Nina Gaby is an innkeeper, writer, visual artist, and nurse-psychotherapist living in Vermont with husband, daughter and numerous pets. She ranks among her highest achievements of late as having been published three times during 2004, and finally getting the arborist over to take care of the Inn's beautiful old trees.

Mark Gaffney is a researcher, writer, poet, environmentalist, anti-nuclear activist, and organic gardener. He is the author of three books (four counting his still-unpublished book of poetry). His most recent book, *Gnostic Secrets of the Naassenes*, was released by *Inner Traditions Press* in May 2004.

Cynthia Gallaher was named among the Chicago Public Library's "Top Ten" most requested Chicago poets. She is the author of three books, *Swimmer's Prayer*, *Earth Elegance* and *Night Ribbons*. She is currently working on two musicals and a children's picture book. **Poem 1 Poem 2**

Louis Gallo is a teacher at Radford University in Virginia. His poems and stories have appeared in *Glimmer Train*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *Greensboro Review*, and *Rattle*.

Phillis Gershator's poetry, reviews and articles have appeared in *The Caribbean Writer* and *Home Planet News*, among other journals. She is also the author or co-author of 20 children's books, most recently *The Babysitter Sings*, *Holt*, and *Wise and Not So Wise*, *JPS*.

John Gilgun is the author of *Everything That Has Been Shall Be Again: The Reincarnation Fables of John Gilgun*, *Bieler Press*, 1981; *Music I Never Dreamed Of*, *Amethyst Press*, 1989; *From the Inside Out*, *Three Phase*, 1991; *The Dooley Poems*, *Robin Price*, 1991; *Your Buddy Misses You*, *Three Phase*, 1995 and *In the Zone: The Moby Dick Poems of John Gilgun*, *Pecan Grove Press*, 2002.

Michael S. Glaser recently received the Homer Dodge Endowed Award for Excellence in Teaching at St. Mary's College in Maryland. He has served as a Maryland Poet-in-the-Schools for 25 years, published over 300 poems in literary journals, newspapers and anthologies. His most recent collection of poems, *Being a Father*, was published in July 2004, when he was also appointed as the State of Maryland's Poet Laureate. **Poem 1 Poem 2**

Gail Kadison Golden is a poet, psychotherapist, and community activist who lives and works in New York City. She has published poems in numerous poetry journals, anthologies and has won many awards for her writing. A collection of her poetry, *Awaiting Creation*, was published in the Fall of 2002 by *Xlibris*.



Myrna Goodman has been a ceramic artist and teacher for over 30 years doing business as "Clay on Words." She has taught language and sculpture to learning disabled and gifted kids, seniors, and newly arrived immigrants. Her poems have appeared in *Icarus*, *Confrontation*, *Karamu*, and *CQ*.

Sharon Lynn Griffiths has appeared in *Long Shot*, *The Paterson Literary Review*, *Cafe Review*, and *Exit 13*. At various points in her life, she was a late-night talk show host on radio; a brown belt in karate, and auditioned for the Milwaukee Symphony. Born and raised in New York City, she moved to North Jersey. Her favorite job was teaching communication and job skills to adult students in Newark, New Jersey.

Nancy Gustafson's poetry, short fiction and articles have appeared in several anthologies and journals including *Cup of Comfort for Inspiration*, *Adams Media Corporation* and *Suddenly IV* and *Suddenly V*, *Stone River Press*. A story appeared in *The Rocking Chair Reader*, *Adams Media*, Sept. 2004 and a poem in *Gardening at a Deeper Level*, *Garden House Press*, Nov. 2004. She is retired from Sam Houston State University.

Gary Hanna has a Masters Degree in English Literature from Indiana University but took a different path and worked in another field. He received the Emerging Artist Fellowship in Literature from the Delaware Division of the Arts in 2003 and won the Brodie Herndon Memorial Prize from the Poetry Society of Virginia in 2002. Twenty-eight poems have been published or won awards in various literary journals in the last three years.

Ellen Hart is a lifetime teacher of language arts and writing is a way of life. She has been published locally in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* and the *2004 Monterey Bay Poetry Anthology*. Her work has appeared in *The World Tribune*, a Buddhist publication and *Perceptions*, a literary journal based in London.

Laura Hartman is a 2003 Summa Cum Laude graduate of Aurora University with a B.A. in arts. She is employed as an Administrative Analyst at Edward Don & Company. In her leisure, she enjoys reading, the theater, movies, traveling with friends and relatives in the FWB Social Club. She lives in Illinois with her husband of 28 years, Jim, three grown sons, and two Black Labs.

Betty Lou Hebert started submitting poems for publication in 1984 and to date has had some 2,500 published in various magazines, books and on the Internet. She lives with her family near a national forest and is surrounded with many lovely trees.

Jackie Hofer is the publisher of SunShine Press Publications since 1987. He published *Tree Stories: A Collection of Extraordinary Encounters*, edited by Warren Jacobs and Karen Shragg, in 2002. His love for trees has continued with the publication of *Tree Magic: Nature's Antennas*. He wrote *One Harmonic Whole: The Song of the Universe* in 1998.

Bradley Earle Hoge is a teacher of natural science at the University of Houston-Downtown. His poetry has appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies, including most recently *BorderSenses*, *The Littoral*, *Limestone*, and *Mercy of Tides: Poems for a Beach House*, and upcoming poems in *Square Lake*, *DOJ (Drexel Online Journal)*, *The Quarterly Journal of Ideology*, and *Talking River*.



Jean Hollander's book of poems, *Moondog*, was a prize winner in the QRL Poetry Books Series. Her first collection, entitled *Crushed into Honey*, won the Eileen W. Barnes Award. Her most recent publications are verse translations of Dante's *Inferno* with Robert Hollander, *Doubleday*, Dec. 2000 and *Purgatory*, Dec. 2002. Her translation of *Paradise* will be appearing in 2005. She teaches literature and poetry at Mercer College.

Warren D. Jacobs is a psychiatrist, storyteller, writer, composer of music and lover of trees. His love for a magnificent maple tree in Cades Cove in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park resulted in the anthology, *Tree Stories: A Collection of Extraordinary Encounters*, *SunShine Press Publications*, 2002.

Brody James is a published author of five books. Two of his novels, *Roadhaze* and *Mind-Dance*, a *Detective Killian Novel*, reflect his love of genre work. In 2004, he started his 14th novel *Burial Rites*, along with an illustrated children's fable, *Dragon's Honor*.

Pearl Karrer is a former microbiologist who teaches piano, Japanese brush painting, exhibits art in juried shows, and writes poetry. Her poems have appeared in anthologies and such journals as *The Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Visions-International*, and *Whetstone*. Her chapbook, *Weathering*, won a Hudson Valley Writer's Center Competition. Recently, she joined the editorial board of *California Quarterly*.

Michael Kaump is a keyboard musician of wide interests and talent. Even though blind since early infancy, he has a deep appreciation and connection with the natural world.

Ardi Keim is an explorer of nature, mind and spiritual reality. He has worked as an electronic technician, truck driver and carpenter. Raised in western Oregon, he currently lives in Minnesota and is inventory manager for the international distribution center of his church.

Kathy Kieth has published poems in many journals, including *Atlanta Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Slant*, *Ekphrasis*, *PDQ*, and *Sow's Ear*. Her chapbook, *A Night Full of Owls*, *White Heron Press*, was released in 2004. She runs Rattlesnake Press, which publishes *Rattlesnake Review*.

Brianne Killoran has a BFA in creative writing from Roger Williams University. She is a Children's Librarian in Holden, MA and also instructs young Writers Groups at area libraries. She collaborates with local newspapers and websites providing publishing opportunities for children.

Laurie Klein's poems are forthcoming in *New Letters*, *Passages North*, *Many Mountains Moving*, *Mid-American Review*, *Potomac Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Commonweal* and numerous anthologies. She won the Owl Creek Chapbook prize for *Bodies of Water*, *Bodies of Flesh* and is the recipient of the 2004 San Juan Writer's Workshop prize. She is an editor of *Rock & Slings*.

Stephen Kopel is known as San Francisco's "Pedalling Poet." His poetry appears in journals worldwide and his book, *Crux*, *Calliope Press*, is part of the library's collection. He is the creator of the Word Painters reading event.



Susan Landon lives in the Boston area and is widely published in the small press. Her work has also appeared online as well as in newspapers and anthologies. As an environmentalist, she is a nature poet who writes frequently about the vagaries and beauty of nature in New England.

Arlene G. Levine is author of *39 Ways to Open Your Heart* and has had prose and poetry published in numerous venues. Among others, her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Unity Magazine*, an Off Broadway show, journals and anthologies. She has recently used a Japanese White Pine and Norwegian spruce planted by her husband in their garden as characters in a middle grade novel.

Karen Lewis is a teaching artist for Just Buffalo Literary Center in Western New York. She also teaches poetry in several public schools and is a contributing editor for *Traffic East Magazine*. Her poetry and writings have appeared in numerous publications, contests, book reviews and feature articles.

Paulette Licitra's work has appeared in the *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, *Bird Watcher's Digest*, *Tea*, *Urban Desires*, *Spectacle*, *Riverdale Press*, and *Nevada Magazine*. She has also written about art and culture for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Portland Art Museum, Cincinnati Art Museum, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, and the Phoenix Museum of Art. She is an avid bird and tree watcher.

Jean Linville is an artist/arts educator and has been responding to trees creatively for the past three years through poetry, book arts, mixed-media sculpture, and black & white photography. She lives in Westchester County in New York State.

Chip Livingston's fiction and poetry has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Appalachee Review*, *Brooklyn Review*, and *Stories from the Blue Moon Cafe -Vol. 3*. He teaches fiction writing in New York City.

Liz Logan's poems have appeared in the *Potomac Review*, *Virginia Writing* and *Synapse*, among others. She has read her poetry in the "Poetry at Noon" reading series at the Library of Congress. Her work has been honored by the Poetry Society of Virginia and the Vietnam Veterans of America.

Steven R. Luebke teaches in the Department of English at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. His poems have appeared in *Poet* magazine, *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*, *Mediphors*, and *The Lucid Stone*.

Carol Wade Lundberg teaches creative writing in private workshops and at Santa Rosa Jr. College in California. Her short stories, poetry, and essays have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Poetry New York*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Albatross*, *Jane's Stories*, and others. **Story Poem**

Toby MacLennan is an artist, filmmaker, writer. She has exhibited sculpture-installations in New York and Canada, won awards for films as well as nonfiction work, and written three short story books published by small presses and been reviewed by *The Village Voice* and *The New York Times*. She is an Associate Professor at Mason Gross School of Arts, Rutgers University.



Marjorie Maddox is Director of Creative Writing and Professor of English at Lock Haven University. She has published two books of poems, *Perpendicular As I*, *Sandstone Book Award*, and *Transplant, Transport, Transubstantiation, Yellowglen Prize*, as well as six chapbooks and over 250 poems in literary journals.

Jacqueline Marcus has a book of poems, *Close to Shore*, published by *Michigan University Press*, 2003. Her poems have appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Ohio Review*, *The Journal*, *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, *Poetry International*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *College English*, *Mid-American Review*, *The Literary Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Faultline*, *The Yalobusha Review* and elsewhere. She teaches philosophy at Cuesta College and is editor of *ForPoetry.com*.

Redwood Mary is a Northern California activist and has worked from the local to the global—from Northern California to the United Nations on environmental, gender and social justice. She is founder of *Plight of the Redwoods Campaign*. She graduated from Mills College with a degree in Public Policy.

Marcia Matthews has appeared in *Hawaii Review*, *Sojourner* and *A Wise Woman's Garden*. Publishing credits include *Incubus I. Fast Friends* and *Incubus II. Hippieville*, *Xlibris*, 2001; *Take Back the Night*, *William Morrow*; 1980, cited; *Fight Back*, *Cleis Press*, 1981, co-author.

Isabelle Maynard is the author of *China Dreams*, *University of Iowa Press*, 1996. She has over 30 stories published in magazines and has completed her new collection of stories, *Love in the Seventh Decade*. Her art is on exhibit and her play *The Ace* was produced in San Francisco.

Scott McMorrow's poetry appears in the chapbook, *The Vagabound Poetry Project*, *Druid Moves Press*, and in *Poets Against War*, *In Other Words*, *S.M.U.T.*, and *EMS*. He is the editor of the poetry anthology *Velvet Heat*, *Pretty Things Press*. His award-winning plays have been produced in Europe and the United States.

María Meléndez has worked as writer-in-residence at the U.C. Davis Arboretum and is a Fellow at the Center for Women's InterCultural Leadership at Saint Mary's College in Indiana, where she teaches creative writing and multi-ethnic environmental literature. Her poetry has appeared in numerous literary magazines and anthologies, including *Sisters of the Earth*, *Vintage Books*, 2003 and *Under the Fifth Sun: Latino Literature from California*, *Heyday Books*, 2002. Her chapbook of poetry, *Base Pairs*, was published by *Swan Scythe Press*, 2001.

Mario Milosevic's poems have appeared in many print and online journals, and in the anthology, *Poets Against the War*. His first two collections of poetry, *Animal Life* and *Fantasy Life* were published in 2004. He lives the Pacific Northwest.

K. Ann Minto grew up on the Island of Jamaica until the age of twelve when she came to live in the United States. Her first published work was in *Spire Press*, Spring 2004.



Bob Monson began writing three years ago and has published poems in *Verse Weavers* and *Out of Line*, January 2005. His short story appeared in *Clackamas Literary Review*. He went to Willamette University and lives in Oregon.

Pearse Murray was born in Dublin and has worked in Ireland, England, United States and India. He is a Staff Architect with the State University of New York at Binghamton. He is working on a collection of poems.

Tina Murray was born in the South and currently lives in Florida where she is pursuing a career as a writer. Her formal education culminated in a Ph.D. in art education from Florida State University. She has worked in education, real estate, clerical, retail, and the arts.

Robens Napolitan's work has appeared in *Many Mountains Moving*, *Talking River Review*, *Orphic Lute*, *cold-drill*, *Heliotrope*, *Connections*, *Coming of Age*, *Women's Work*, *The Hungry Poet*, and *Northern Journeys*. She is a regular participant in Sandpoint, Idaho's open-mike venue, "Five Minutes of Fame" and a member of the weekly Sandpoint Writers Collective. She works seasonally as a landscape gardener, getting her hands as dirty as possible.

Ted Olson is currently Associate Professor at East Tennessee State University. He is the author of [Blue Ridge Folklife](#); the editor of a poetry collection by the late Kentucky author James Still, [From the Mountain, From the Valley](#); the editor of [CrossRoads: A Southern Culture Annual](#), *Mercer University Press*, 2004. Additionally, he is the author of many articles, essays, encyclopedia entries, reviews, oral histories, poems, and creative nonfiction pieces published in a wide variety of books and periodicals.

Al Pace has made his living as a climber and pruner of trees. He has written many feature stories for the Old Lyons Recorder and the Redstone Review in Lyons, Colorado. With Kathleen Spring, he co-produced the video documentary, [Lyons Sandstone Quarry History: Our Stones Gather Moss](#).

Teresa Peipins is a Latvian-American writer living in Barcelona, Spain, and has just completed her first novel.

Pit Menousek Pinegar is the author of two books of poetry, [Nine Years between Poems](#) and [The Possibilities of Empty Space](#). She has completed a manuscript, [The Physics of Transmigration](#). Although she talks frequently about moving from her 1930s vintage Connecticut colonial home, she has not been able to bear the thought of giving up the maple tree that casts the rooms gold for a week each October.

Kenneth Pobo grew up in Illinois and now lives in Pennsylvania where he teaches English and Creative Writing at Widener University. His new book of poems, [Introductions](#), is available from *Pearl's Book'Em Press*. He loves to garden and to collect obscure pop/psyche/bubblegum records from the 1960s and country music from the 1970s.

Adrian S. Potter's poetry and fiction have appeared in several journals. He won First Prize in the 2003 Langston Hughes Poetry contest. He resides in Minnesota.



Ann Quid was born in Colorado in 1943, and has chased the sun since the age of five. She began writing as a child, and at age 51, discovered the joy of composing poetry. She looks forward to decades more of engaging in this supernal art form and craft.

Zara Raab lives a quiet life as a writer in Northern California where her family has lived for six generations as miners, loggers and cattle ranchers. Her writing is often about rural life. She won First Place and two Honorable Mentions in a poetry contest sponsored by the Bay Area Poets Coalition.

David Radavich's poetry collections include Slain Species, By the Way: Poems over the Years, and Greatest Hits. His plays have been performed across the U.S., including five Off-Off-Broadway productions, as well as in Europe. He enjoys writing scholarly and informal essays on poetry, drama, and contemporary issues.

Burt Rashbaum writes poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. In 1985, he shared the National Lesbian and Gay Press Association Human Interest Award for The Fragile Cord, and his poem, My Beautiful Kite. In 1997 he appeared in XY Files: Poems on the Male Experience, *Sherman-Asher Press*. He has two published collections, Becoming An American (fiction), and A Century of Love (nonfiction) *Xlibris*, 2000. He lives in Colorado.

Bernice Rendrick's poetry has appeared in *The Montserrat Review*, *Monterey Bay Poets* and *Quarry West*. She participates in many poetry activities and belongs to a group called the Front Street Poets.

Peter Rennebohm is a writer of short stories and a novelist. He has been published in various anthologies and literary collections. He is a lifelong resident of Minnesota living on a ten acre hobby farm west of Minneapolis.

Howard Rheingold was the editor of *Whole Earth Review* and the *Millennium Whole Earth Catalog*. His most recent book was Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution.

Mitchell B. Rider, M.D.(1921-1993) was an ophthalmologist in Denver, Colorado for many years. He was fascinated by many topics, among them Japanese and Haiku.

Edward J. Rielly is the Chairman of the English Department, St. Joseph's College, Westbrook, Maine. His publications include nine books of poetry, most recently, A Fine, Safe Journey by *Pudding House*.

Elisavietta Ritchie's books include: The Spirit of the Walrus, *Bright Hill Press* chapbook winner, 2005; In Haste I Write You This Note: Stories & Half-Stories, co-winner, *Washington Writers' Publishing House*, 2000; Flying Time: Stories & Half Stories (four PEN Syndicated Fiction winners); The Arc of the Storm; Elegy for the Other Woman: New and Selected Terribly Female Poems; Tightening the Circle Over Eel Country, and many other awards and honors.

Mark Robbins is a former Director of Advertising and Public Relations for Art Theatre Guild, importer and exhibitor of foreign films in Scottsdale, Arizona. He has traveled in all continents, many islands, and lived in Bangkok for four years.



J. E. Robinson is a widely published essayist, poet, and short story writer. His poetry chapbook, Five Verses, appeared in 2001. A full-length poetry collection is forthcoming. He lives in Illinois.

Natalie Safir is the author of four collections of poetry: Moving Into Seasons, To Face the Inscription, Made Visible and A Clear Burning. Her work has appeared in many literary journals and in several college texts. She is a therapist and teaches poetry writing.

Reg Saner's poetry and prose have appeared widely in literary magazines and anthologies, and have won several national prizes. A longtime Coloradan, his forthcoming book of nonfiction, The Dawn Collector, will be published in Spring 2005 by the *Center for American Places*.

Sharon Scholl is a retired professor of humanities from Jacksonville University in Florida. Her two collections of poetry are Unauthorized Biographies, *Closet Books*, 2002 and All Points Bulletin, *Closet Books*, 2004. She is a musician and composer for the Unitarian Universalist Church.

Micheal Scott has an MFA from Western Michigan University. His stories and poems have appeared in many literary magazines. He lives on the remnants of a failed family farm in Michigan with his three cats.

Jan Epton Seale is the author of a textbook on writing, a collection of short stories, a book of essays, and five volumes of poetry. Her magazine credits include *Writer's Digest*, *Texas Monthly*, *Newsday*, and *The Yale Review*.

Joanne Seltzer's poems have appeared in When I Am An Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple, The Muse Strikes Back, and many other anthologies. She has been published in a variety of periodicals, including *The Minnesota Review*, *The Village Voice*, *Waterways* and *Karamu*.

Jessica Shen has been writing poetry for two years and is a senior in high school. She will be taking an advanced poetry course, and enjoys participating in colorguard and listening to music.

Joan I. Siegel's work has appeared in *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Commonweal*, and in anthologies including Poetry Comes Up Where It Can, *University of Utah Press*. She co-authored Peach Girl: Poems for a Chinese Daughter. In 1999 she received the New Letters Poetry Prize. **Poem 1 Poem 2**

Leslie Silton is an artist, poet and photographer and has published four chapbooks. Her writing has been disseminated in theatre, CD, radio and over the internet. She helped found four writers groups, has participated in over 100 open mics in the U.S. and Paris.

Lynda Skeen has been published in a variety of journals, including *North American Review*, *Tiger's Eye*, *Lucid Stone*, *Talking Leaves*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Poetry Motel*. She recently won Honorable Mention in the National League of American Pen Women's Soul-Making Literary Competition.



Madeleine Marie Slavick's 2004 book, *Delicate Access*, was published in Hong Kong by *Sixth Finger Press* in a bilingual English-Chinese edition. She is the author of *China: The Dragon Awakes* with Lee Ho Yin, 1995; *Children in China* with Barbara Baker and Michael Karhausen, 1997; the award-winning *Round: Poems and Photographs of Asia* with Barbara Baker, 1998. She edits *Oxfam Magazine* and *Sixth Finger Press* publications.

John E. Smelcer's poetry has appeared in over 300 magazines, including *The Atlantic Monthly*. Educated at Cambridge, he is a Humanities Professor at Embry-Riddle University.

Stacy Smith is the editor of *Reflections of Nature: An Anthology of Nature Poems* and *In the Eyes of the Wild: An Anthology of Wildlife Poetry & Short Stories*. Her poetry has appeared in *The Heron's Nest* haiku journal, the 2004 *Angel Datebook* and *Birds and Bloom*. She and Betty Lou Hebert co-wrote a chapbook, *Along the River and Through Flowered Fields*. All royalties from the chapbook go directly to Wildlife Resqu Haus, a wildlife rehab center in Indiana.

Paul Sohar's poetry has appeared in numerous magazines, *Chiron*, *Hunger*, *Main Street Rag*, *Poem*, *Rattle*, *Sanskrit*, and others. He has six books of translation, the most significant is *Dancing Embers*, selected poems by the prominent Hungarian poet Sandor Kanyadi, published by *Twisted Spoon Press*, 2002.

J. R. Solonche's works have appeared in many periodicals, including *The American Scholar*, *The New Criterion*, *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Poet Lore*, and *The Anthology of Magazine Verse*.

David Starkey teaches in the MFA program at Antioch University-Los Angeles and is the author of a textbook, *Poetry Writing: Theme and Variations*, *NTC*, 1999. He is the author of *David Starkey's Greatest Hits*, *Pudding House*, 2002 and is included in *Fear of Everything*, winner of *Palanquin Press's Spring 2000* chapbook contest. In addition, over the past fourteen years he has over 300 poems in literary magazines such as *American Scholar*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *High Plains Literary Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Poetry East* and *Wormwood Review*.

William R. Stimson lost his "day job" in Manhattan and relocated to Taiwan. He lives in a small town up against the foothills in the interior of the country where life is inexpensive and there is ample time to write and read. He has appeared in *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Sun*, *Utne Reader*, *Snowy Egret*, and *The Potomac Review*.

Dorothy Stone is a retired teacher, a published poet and essayist, appearing in numerous journals and anthologies. She has an MFA in theatre based on work at BU and Yale, and was nominated for a 2002 Pushcart Prize.

Norma Strong's works have appeared in *Art Times*, *California Quarterly*, *Rockford Review*, *Street Beat*, *River Run*, *Paintbrush*, and *Encore Magazine*. She is in the anthology *Home and Other Places*.

Judith Lyn Sutton has an M.A. in English from San Francisco State University, and has taught poetry for the past five years. Her work as a poet has been honored for the past four years by the National League of American Pen Women. Along with many awards in the U.S. and Canada, her first book of poetry appeared in 2004, *Prism* by *Cader Publishing, Inc.* Several of the poems are in praise of trees which have been for her a lifelong passion.



R. L. Tener has been writing poetry for over 30 years and is a retired teacher of Shakespeare, Modern British and Continental Drama. He co-edited with Dr. Yoshinobu Hakutani an edition of Richard Wright's haiku, Haiku: This Other World, *Arcade Publishing Co.*, 1998. He is founder and first director of Wick Poetry Series at Kent State University. Currently, he is the first and major reader for the William Carlos Williams poetry contest at Northeastern Ohio Medical College.

Mark Thalman's poems have been published for the last three decades. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Oregon. He lives in Oregon with his wife, Carole, and their two golden retrievers, Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie.

Jamie Thrush lives in Western Pennsylvania with her husband and children. Her heart, however, remains in Toms River, New Jersey where she grew up. Much of her poetry is about the area and of her childhood memories.

Vincent J. Tomeo has 332 poems published and has won 50 awards. He received honorable mention in the 1999 Rainer Maria Rilke International Poetry Competition.

Greg Tuleja was born in New Jersey and received degrees in biology and music from Rutgers University. He has worked as a musician, piano technician, and teacher, and is now the Academic Dean at a private high school. His fiction has appeared in several literary journals and magazines. He lives in Massachusetts.

Claudia Van Gerven's poems have been published in a number of journals and anthologies. Her chapbook, The Ends of Sunbonnet Sue, won the 1997 Angel Fish Press Prize. Her book, The Spirit String, was a finalist in several national contests, including the 2003 Bright Hill Poetry Contest. She lives in Colorado.

Gloria Vando's most recent book, Shadows and Supposes, won the 2003 Best Poetry Book of the Year Award from the Latino Literary Hall of Fame and the Poetry Society of America's Alice Fay Di Castagnola Award. She is the publisher/editor of Helicon Nine Editions, which she founded in 1977 and for which she received the Kansas Governor's Arts Award. In 1992, she and her husband, Bill Hickok, founded The Writers Place, a literary center in Kansas City.

Linda Hofer Waldron's appreciation of trees began as she would seek refuge in the shade of the sparse population of trees in Kansas, her native semi-arid state. She experienced the further reduction of shade trees as Dutch Elm disease wiped out many of the Elm trees in her hometown. She currently resides in Wisconsin where trees are plentiful and give her moments of peace and reflection that truly bring joy to the soul.

Timothy Walsh's poems and short stories have appeared widely, most recently in *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Rivendell*, *Wisconsin Academy Review*, *Free Verse*, and *West Wind Review*. He has won many prizes for both his fiction and poetry, including the Grand Prize in the 2004 Atlanta Review International Poetry Competition. He has written a book of literary criticism, The Dark Matter of Words: Absence, Unknowing, and Emptiness in Literature, and is currently at work on a novel. **Poem Story**



William G. Ward is the author of 16 books, all prose, about photography, writing, journalism, and one book of light essays. Now, he devotes most of his creative time to writing poetry, his first love. He has a chapbook of poetry, Dialogues with the Wumwum Tree, 1999. He recently had a successful day when he found a good word to rhyme with Xerxes. **Poem 1 Poem 2 Poem 3**

J. C. Watson has been writing for over 40 years with 300 poems published in small presses, usually University Presses. Her first novel is Current Wisdom, Spring 2005 by *LBF Books*.

Susan Steger Welsh is the author of Rafting on the Water Table, *New Rivers Press*, 2000, and recipient of Minnesota State Arts Board and SASE/Jerome fellowships. She lives in Minnesota with her family in an old neighborhood with lots of trees.

Cynthia West is known for painting, photography, digital imaging, and book arts. Her works are in many collections. She is the author of For Beauty Way (poetry), *Inked Wingbeat*, 1990, and 1000 Stone Buddhas (poetry), *Inked Wingbeat*, 1993, and Rainbringer, *Sunstone Press*, 2004.

Alice Ahrens Williams is a workshop facilitator and art editor of *The Common Ground Revue*. Her writing has appeared in *California Quarterly*, *Common Ground Revue*, *Connecticut River Revue*, *Freshwater Magazine*, *Northeast Magazine*, *Pine Island Journal*, among others. Publications include Art of the Maine Islands, *Down East Books* and We The Creatures, *Dream Horse Press*.

Daniel Williams has lived in the forests of the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California for 30 years. He has never met a tree that he hasn't liked immediately, especially the elegant and magnificent Giant Sequoia of the Mariposa Grove in Yosemite where he works. **Poem 1 Poem 2**

Paul J. Willis is professor of English at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. His poems have appeared in *Poetry* and *Wilderness*. His most recent chapbook is How to Get There, *Finishing Line Press*, 2004. He is co-editor of In a Fine Frenzy: Poets Respond to Shakespeare, *University of Iowa Press*, 2005.

Christopher Woods is a poet and playwright living in Houston. His books include a prose collection, Under a Riverbed Sky, *Panther Creek Press*, and a collection of stage monologues, Heart Speak, *Stone River Press*.

Cherise Wyneken is a freelance writer who has enjoyed sharing her prose and poetry with readers through a variety of journals, periodicals, and anthologies. Her three books of poetry are Touchstones, *Winston-Derek Publishers, Inc.*, Seeded Puffs, *Dry Bones Press, Inc.* and Round Trip, *PublishAmerica*, a memoir of her spiritual journey.

Gordon Yaswen is a poet and artist who has published 23 chapbooks with drawings. His poetry deals largely with issues of self-healing and the Spiritual Quest, and is sometimes mystic, often personal, and always intelligible.
Poem Story



Holly Zeeb has been writing poetry for twenty-five years. Her love for an old family homestead in Maine has informed her writing and her devotion to the natural world. Currently, she is working on a chapbook about her mother's progressive dementia. Her poems have been published most recently in *Pudding*, *Concrete Wolf*, *Fresh Water* (*Pudding* anthology), *Do Not Give Me Things Unbroken*, *Snowy Egret* (forthcoming).

Trees are Beautiful





ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHERS AND ARTISTS

T. D. Boyd (1921-2003) was a writer, photographer and native Californian. He came to Longmont, Colorado in 1987 and immediately embraced the beauties of Colorado. As a member of the Longmont Artist's Guild, his photographs were shown in local galleries. In this instance, he was shooting photos of the forest with a twin-lens Rolliflex when a doe wandered into the scene to watch the process. **199**

Maureen Ruddy Burkhart has been a photographer for over 30 years, evolving through many phases, from portrait to editorial to documentary to fine art photographer. The medium has been a gift that allows her to delve into the depths of people's souls and to know and love the natural world. **26, 40, 114, 345 left**

Brett Cole - Use courtesy of Timothy Hermach, Native Forest Council. Aerial photo: Wild Northwest Photography **103**

Kathleen Cain's poems have appeared in several literary magazines and anthologies. She is a contributing editor for *The Bloomsbury Review* and is currently doing research for a book about cottonwood trees.

10, 33, 44, 47, 80, 161, 185, 227, 243, 282, 287, 302, 314, 391, 397 left

Trish Flanders has been a professional fine art photographer for over 12 years who began exploring the arts at an early age. Her father, who was a professional fine art photographer, initiated Trish into the world of photography. Her mother's love of the wilderness nurtured her delight for nature photography during family visits to Yosemite National Park. She has photographed nature in California, Canada, the Great Lakes, France, Arizona, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina and other locations. **420**

Friedrich Grohe was born in Schiltach, Germany in 1929. He joined the family business, the Grohe Faucet Company, soon after leaving school and helped to make it one of the premier companies of its kind in the world. He left the business in his forties, however, preferring nature to offices, and spent the next ten years climbing mountains. When he began reading the work of J. Krishnamurti, and after meeting him in 1983, he began a dedication to Krishnamurti's Schools, Foundations and Study Centres that continues to this day. **13, 110, 120, 290, 307**

Phillip Hall - (clearcut upper left photo) Courtesy of Bureau of Land Management. **103**

Tom Harbon is a retired professor of computer science whose hobbies include photographing birds and writing. He and his wife maintain a web site, *Birds of Madison County*, which they update monthly with new bird and wildlife pictures from central Indiana and beyond. **258**



Gretchen Hofer was born and raised along the Front Range of Colorado. She enjoys being outdoors with nature: gardening, hiking and camping. Her photographs are snapshots taken on her many outings in the Rockies.

6, 8, 16, 19, 158, 165, 173, 263, 358, 377, 384, 414

Jackie Hofer has been enamored with trees since childhood. Over the years, he has photographed hundreds of different trees.

1, 9, 11, 12, 29, 37, 55, 59, 62, 73, 93, 127, 130, 133, 138, 141, 148, 151, 177, 181, 192, 206, 209, 220, 223, 231, 235, 246, 276, 295, 299, 311, 328, 332, 345 right, 364, 368, 373, 380, 388, 394, 397 r&c, 404, 413, 415, 416, 417, 418, 439, 447, 448, 449

Warren Jacobs and his spiritual experience with the Cades Cover maple has resulted in a lifelong love for all trees. 320

Jean Linville is an artist/arts educator and has been responding to trees creatively for the past three years through poetry, book arts, mixed-media sculpture, and black & white photography. She lives in Westchester County in New York State. 145

William Lowrey is a native born Coloradoan. He began exhibiting his artwork and photography in 2003. Many of his pieces express his inner vision of the surrounding world. 106

Steve Maslowski - (eagle) Courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 169

Dave Menke - (Norther Flicker) Courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 258

Katie Metz creates art as a part of her life and as the basis of all her work, especially in painting which is her greatest passion. She continues to paint and experiment with new mediums and techniques. Most subject matter appeals to her. She sees a painting everywhere she looks. She sees shapes, values, rhythm and relationship in and among all things which evokes an emotional response that often becomes a drawing, a sketch or a finished painting. Her attitude toward life and relationship to art are one. 51, 355

Karen Pickett is the co-founder and director of the Bay Area Coalition for Headwaters and has been a key organizer of the Headwaters Forest campaign. Karen has worked on issues of biodiversity, forests and recycling for more than twenty-five years. She is currently a board member, as well as co-founder, of the Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment, which brings environmental advocates and those in labor together to work on a variety of issues. She is on the Board of the Global Justice Ecology Project and is a former Board member of the Ecology Center. 252



Jacqua Schmich has lived in Colorado for 40 years and began painting Colorado scenery shortly after moving there. She paints watercolors or oils depending on the subject. Colorado oil landscapes are her first love but she continues to be fascinated with the colors and shapes of aspen trees. **422**

Jacqueline Tuteur graduated from State University of New York where she developed a passion and talent for art, and began teaching herself silk screening and photography. For over 20 years she has exhibited her artwork at juried outdoor art shows, winning over 35 awards, including Best-in Show. Her impressionistic style captures a surreal quality of beauty, mystery and intimacy, exemplifying the power and flair of an artist whose expanse and scope are unmatched and breathtaking. **336, 419**

Linda Hofer Waldron's appreciation of trees began as she would seek refuge in the shade of the sparse population of trees in Kansas, her native semi-arid state. She experienced the further reduction of shade trees as Dutch Elm disease wiped out many of the Elm trees in her hometown. She currently resides in Wisconsin where trees are plentiful and give her moments of peace and reflection that truly bring joy to the soul. **216, 407, 443**

Tony Waldron is an elementary art teacher in Leavenworth, Kansas. Tony enjoys painting and experimenting with art media on flat surfaces. Landscapes, portraits, and abstract shapes are his favorite subject matter. He considers himself an abstract expressionist. **255**

David Weber's youth was spent growing up on a farm in South Dakota. Fondest memories are of those days and how he enjoyed the peace and solitude of the surroundings. This probably explains why painting a landscape with trees takes him into his comfort zone. **400**

Bureau of Land Management - Upper right photo: courtesy BLM **103**

NASA - Earth image courtesy of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration **450**



Trees are Healers



CREDITS FOR PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED WORKS

A Blessing for the Woods by Michael S. Glaser, *Christian Science Monitor*, May 19, 1999.

A Cutting Event by Cherise Wyneken, Seeded Puffs, *Dry Bones Press, Inc.*

A Pink Cherry Blossom by Toby MacLennan, an unrevised version appeared in a contest issue of *Snowline Poetry Journal*, Fall 2002 under the title Spring Vases.

A Sunday Walk with Father by Todd Davis, *The Journal of Kentucky Studies*, Vol. 12, 1995 and Ripe: Poems, *Bottom Dog Press*, 2002.

A Tree for All Seasons by Frank Finale, Jersey Shore Home & Garden, *Jersey Shore Publications*, 2004.

A Year of Yellow by Susan Landon, *The Aurorean*, Fall, 2003 and *Out of the Blue Writers Unite*, Dec. 2003.

An Elder Remembers Trees by Lynda Skeen, Tiger's Eye.

Asleep in the Undercut by Tony D'Arpino, published as a limited edition broadside by *Clamshell Press*.

Bearded Tree by Christopher Woods, *Turbula* an online magazine published in San Diego.

Breathing by Sharon Scholl, *Quantum Tao*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1996 as one section of a much longer poem.

Bristlecone by Gordon Yaswen, To Yearn & Yield, *Poet's Chapbook #5*, limited edition.

Child Autumn by David Radavich, *Time of Singing Magazine*.

Clippers by William R. Stimson, *Snowy Egret*, 62(2):13-19, Autumn 1999.

Cottonwood by Simone Poirier-Bures, *WUTF* public radio essay in Roanoke, VA, May 1999.

Evergreen by Richard Heifetz Bernstein, appeared on city buses by Seattle Metro Transit.

For a Neighbor with Cancer by David Starkey, 45/96: The Ninety-Six Anthology of South Carolina Poetry, *Ninety-Six Press*, 1994.

Freeman Creek Grove by Paul J. Willis, *Sierra Heritage*.



Free-range Christmas Trees by Candace Calsoyas, *Writing Nature*, summer 2004.

Freezing Moon by Mark Thalman, *Widener Review*, Issue #5, 1998.

Fruit Trees by Cynthia Gallaher, *Swimmer's Prayer*, *Missing Spoke Press*, Seattle, 2000.

Gnome by Frank Finale, *Dan River Anthology*, *Dan River Press*, 1986 and *Coffee House Poems*, *Carpenter Gothic Press*, 2003.

Harvest by Gail Kadison Golden, *The New Jersey Poetry Monthly*, May 1977.

Have a Good Day... And Goodbye by William G. Ward, *Dialogues with a Wumwum Tree*, *Bill Ward*, August 1999.

Heir Apparent by Ted Olson, forthcoming in *Rivendell*, Issue 4, Spring 2005.

Her Way to the Soil by Nancy Gustafson, *A Book of the Year 2000*, *The Poetry Society of Texas* and *Banshee Studios Magazine*, Imblog issue, Feb. 2003.

Homesickness by Cathryn Essinger, *Heartlands Today*, Firelands Campus, Bowling Green State University.

How Soon is the Fig Tree Withered Away by Jan Epton Seale, *Homeland*, *New Santander Press*, 1995.

If You Would be a Poet by Timothy Walsh, *The Midwest Quarterly*, Summer 2003.

Killing Christmas Trees with Dad by David Feela, *The Denver Post*, Sunday, Dec. 3, 2000 and *Inside/Outside Southwest Magazine*, Dec., 1999.

Learning My Name by Gloria Vando, *Promesas: Geography of the Impossible*, *Arte Público Press*, *University of Houston*, 1993.

Learning Tree by Adrian S. Potter, *Talking Stick 13*, *Reflections*.

Lessons from the Urban Woods by Sharon Griffiths, *Paper Salvation*, *Wasteland Press*, 2004.

Lost Shadows by Glenn Evans, *Poet's West Literary Journal*.

Love Like a Tree by Ellen Kitzes Delfiner, *New Author's Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Summer 1994.

Maple Seed: A Love Poem by Marjorie Maddox published in *Blueline*.



Maples by Micheal Scott, *Rag Mag*, a small literary magazine in Minnesota.

McMahon's Tree by Vincent J. Tomeo. A different version of the same poem appeared in Laurels, *West Virginia Poetry Society Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Fall 2003.

My Tree by Burt Rashbaum, *Little Brown Poetry Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 6, Sep. 2001. (an online anthology)

Nature's Way by Al Pace, Writers: Birthing Creative Writing and Capturing Random Memories, edited by Kathleen Spring.

Old Tree by Dorothy Stone, *Thema*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Autumn 2003.

On the Disappearance of a Neighbor by William G. Ward, Dialogues with a Wumwum Tree, *Bill Ward*, August 1999.

Parting by Pearl Karrer, *Liberty Hill Poetry Review*, 1997.

Poem for Trees by Alice Friman, first printed in *The Laurel Review*. Reprinted in her book, ZOO, *University of Arkansas Press*, 1999.

Poem No. 2 by William G. Ward, from a *Child's Book of Natural Verses*.

Replacing Fire by Renée E. D'Aoust won first prize (nonfiction category) in the 16th annual Writers Competition at the Coeur d'Alene Public Library.

She Dreams of Trees by Deborah Gordon Cooper, the chapbook, The Gods of Wild Things.

Tale of Two Trees by Phillis Gershator, revised version of poem in *The Caribbean Writer*, Spring 1988.

The Birch Tree by Joanne Seltzer, *Waterways*.

The Growth of Forests by Edward J. Rielly, My Struggling Soil, *The Plowman*, 1994.

The Maples of Dachau by Laurie Klein, *Jewish Currents*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (622), Jan-Feb, 2004.

The Screw of the Cider Press by Timothy Walsh, *Wisconsin Academy Review*, Winter 1993-94.

The Shape of the Universe by Howard Rheingold, *Whole Earth Review*, No. 80, Fall 1993.

The Speech of Trees by Cynthia Gallaher, Sycamore Roots, *Ice Cube Press*, North Liberty, Iowa, 1997 and Swimmer's Prayer, *Missing Spoke Press*, Seattle, 2000.



The Tree Beyond Imagining by Reg Saner, Reaching Keet Seel: Ruin's Echo and The Anasazi, *University of Utah Press*, 1998.



Tree Climbing by Ardi Keim, Tree Song, "print-on-demand" book of poetry.

Tree Song by Betty Lou Hebert, *pub28.bravenet.com*, 2001.

Tree Talk by Vivian Demuth, Breathing Nose Mountain, *Long Shot Productions*, 2004.

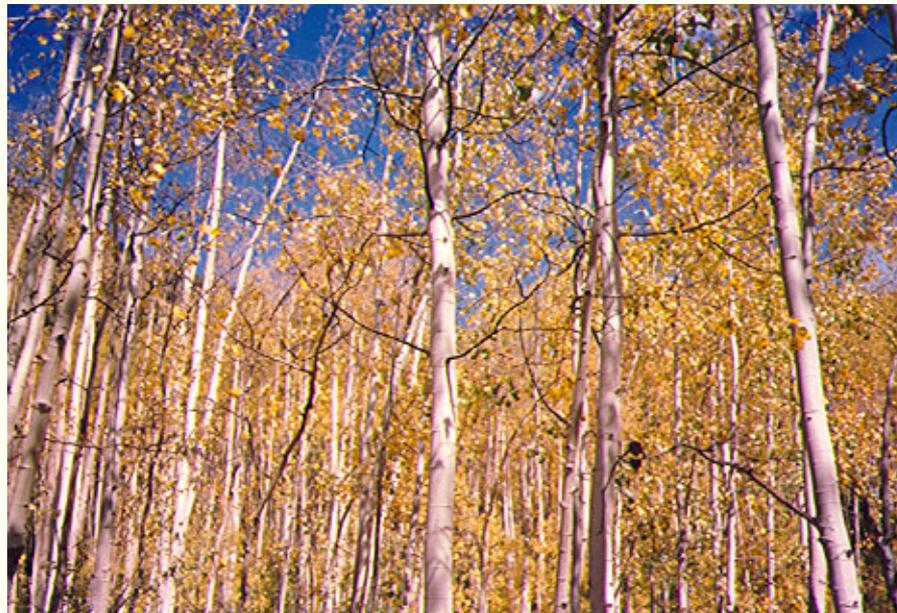
Trees by Jean Hollander, *Potpourri*.

Untitled by Madeleine Marie Slavick, Delicate Access, *Sixth Finger Press*, Hong Kong, Oct. 2004.

What this Means, Being Cottonwood by Kathleen Cain, Times of Sorrow, Times of Grace, *Backwaters Press*, 2002 and City Kite and Wire: 38 Denver Poets, Ed. Ray Gonzales, *Messilla Press*, 1987.

Willow Nursery by Robens Napolitan, *Northern Journeys*, Bonners Ferry, Idaho.

111 Trees - Teresa Mese quote in Endnote courtesy of the Fort Morgan Museum.





When you need a friend, lean on a tree.
—*Gretchen Hofer*



Each generation takes the earth as trustees. We ought to bequeath to posterity as many forests and orchards as we have exhausted and consumed.

—*J. Sterling Morton*



The earth is one country, and mankind its citizens.
—*Bahá'u'lláh*



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My gratitude to Warren D. Jacobs for his original idea and work to edit a wonderful collection of stories and poems from people who have had meaningful encounters with trees. His dedicated effort, along with co-editor Karen L. Shragg, resulted in publication of the book, *Tree Stories: A Collection of Extraordinary Encounters* by SunShine Press Publications.

My special thanks to Kathleen Cain who allowed me to use several of her tree photographs and provided valuable comments.

Love to Jacqueline Klein, my daughter, for her love and encouragement to give the *Tree Magic* project a go. To Evan and Noah Klein my grandsons and Makylah and Matea Stroder my great-granddaughters, in the hope that when they grow up there will be old growth forests and roadless wilderness areas where they can go to renew and nurture their spirit.

Love to Suzzanne Ahmann, my daughter, Stephen Hofer, my son, and Krista Stroder, my granddaughter, Mike Klein, my son-in-law.

Warmest love to Gretchen Hofer for her invaluable help on *Tree Magic* and her unwavering love and daily hugs.

A heartfelt thanks to all the authors and artists who were willing to have their work appear on *Tree Magic*.