



LESSONS FROM A TREE

*From the Personal Journal of Deveron Long
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AS I drive home, my thoughts hover outside my body. Somewhere above my vehicle they mingle with the flickering patterns of morning sunlight that hail my journey through these corridors of almond orchards. I allow images of the recent walk to wash over me like orchard snow on lazy currents. These moments of reverie are where the words are born—even though I may not notice. Impetuous thoughts scatter instantly when, out of the corner of my eye, my awareness centers squarely on the most enormous oak tree I have ever seen.

Although the car speeds by this massive guardian, my mind inches past in slow motion, mesmerized by gnarled branches that reach farther than I can even estimate. Astonishment seizes my breath. In a most visceral sense, the depths of my body—the wild core of me—feels this ancient tree calling to me. But in my moment of awe, I lose the opportunity to pull over to the side of the road. The line of vehicles behind me urges me forward. I will have to meet the ancient one another day. Heavy disappointment lodges in my chest.

For days I must suspend the journey back, and in this space of aching patience, I continue to wonder. I have driven past this location hundreds of times over the past 30 years. Why am I just now noticing this incredible tree? Why do

I feel the tug of its colossal arms? Why am I compelled to be in its presence? I feel the need to touch this mystical giant.

A glorious weekend of sunshine passes, and I still cannot travel back. I am hours away in a two-day seminar. Trapped. Indoors. I am part of this human orchard, sitting on chairs in tidy rows with 600 other two-leggeds, learning about stock trading. The image of Barry Lopez' childhood description of orchards as "penal colonies" tickles me.

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incredible tree?*

Why do I feel the tug of its colossal arms?

Why am I compelled to be in its presence?

*I feel the need to touch
this mystical giant.*

I smile. Did I really pay for this? I could have spent precious time with the guardian, the ancient one. At the end of Day 2, when the seminar concludes, I dash to my car with one thought in mind: I have to beat the sunset. If I can get back before the sun dips beneath the Coast Range, I can spend a few precious moments with the tree.

I race the sun for two hours and make good headway. Somehow, in the last few feet above the gentle peaks, the sun alters time. I watch its discernible descent as it disappears in a pink-gold blaze behind the soft folds of blue-gray mountains. I press forward, knowing that the mystical twilight will hold space for a brief encounter.

It's nearly dark by the time I navigate my car off the old country highway. A massive black silhouette looms over the landscape. This loving gentle giant has a gravity of its own. I stand in reverence and allow its sacred power to overwhelm me. It is rooted deeply in the Earth and yet it stretches far above toward the heavens. The tree speaks of its challenge between soul and spirit. In its full embodied relationship with the Earth, it still longs for blessings of the heavens. At that moment I know that I, too, am the Ancient One who lives this timeless challenge.

Ancient Tree

*Anchored in deep roots
I cling to Earth.
Though fiercely in love with her,
My aging body—
gnarled and twisted through eons—
spirals toward the heavens.
Willowy wings float in the ethers,
aspiring to escape earthly bonds.
Timeless challenge.*

