

HEAR A EULOGY FOR THE TREES

The legacy of these trees holds whispers of another way.

The way of generosity, in its purest, most selfless form. Without attachment or negotiation. Giving the best of gifts in spite of less than ideal circumstance.

The way of joy-filled being. Not holding on to the inner stories of grievance or complaint or even of wild success. Not chasing the numerous illusions and bobbleheads of the ego - just delighting in being an apple tree, and pouring joy into the great work.

The way of quietness and gentleness, of acceptance for what is. Offering a non-anxious, non-judging presence. A walk in the orchard is always an invitation into the present moment, to be right here, right now.

"If these trees could talk", we say. Yet they do. Their storied lives ask us to pay attention to the earth, to our own stories, and to where our stories meet - in the air we breathe and in the ground beneath our feet.

They ask us to give attention to the past and to the future. Before this work of art, an orchard. A hundred years ago before the orchard, a dairy farm and tobacco land. Before that, our memory fades to the imagination of a forested ridge tended by its first peoples. This spring, at the time this work of art was being made, my son found an arrowhead protruding from a bit of open ground not 100 yards from here. A quiet yet persistent witness to a time when this land offered abundant food of kinds we now either despise or forget and was home to people to whom we've done the same.

The stories quietly held by the land and the trees tell of life, and also death. Of freedom and wildness, and also of captivity and domestication. Of joy and flourishing, and also of grief and brokenness. It's our story too, this paradox in the land and trees.

And what stories will be told 100 years from now? And how will the stories of the land and the trees be ours also? Will we have learned to live at peace with ourselves and with the land and what it requires of us? Or will we have been so slow to learn that this land finally becomes a mere witness to the manifest failures of industrial farming?

If these trees have a dying wish, I think it is this. Stay and listen. Wait a while. Give full attention inward and outward. Learn their way. Never forget their life, their joy, their stories, their legacy. Until patience has her perfect way with you and yields in you the fruit of wisdom.

~ Clair Kauffman, '23