

WORTH MORE STANDING

POETS AND ACTIVISTS
PAY HOMAGE TO TREES

EDITED BY
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“The tree is in the midst of an intellectual renaissance, judging by all the books on the lifeways, politics and communicative tendencies of networked forests. But poets have always been a People of the Tree, and the arboreal fund gathered in *Worth More Standing* covers the roots and branches of the entwined process of ‘becoming both human and tree.’ Our fate and the fate of forests have never been more entangled. This is a gorgeous and necessary collection, to be returned to again and again.”

—Stephen Collis,
Governor General’s Award-nominated poet

“A chorus of poetic witness to the irreplaceable value of natural and old-growth forests to the vitality of our ecosystem and our own souls and bodies, *Worth More Standing* invites the reader to open its pages anywhere and find language that redeems, in myriad forms and voices, our true relationship to nature.”

—Sharon Thesen,
acclaimed poet and editor; writer, critic, and Professor of Creative Writing

“In this eclectic grove of poems written and gathered on the body of trees, poets inflect, root, bend towards the mythopoetic, listening with love to arboreality, walking the path towards tree immersion. ‘Make no mistake, I saw them relax their limbs and droop. Settling into their dreams.’ A language that will always mystify and sustain us. Enjoy this collection and touch wood. ‘tree, tell me what have you done with death.’ ‘today i ate chainsaws for breakfast.’”

—Mona Fertig,
editor of *Love of the Salish Sea Islands* and *111 West Coast Literary Portraits*

From the bottom of my roots I thank the unceded Tla-o-qui-aht territory where I live and work; its people, particularly Gisele Martin; Vici Johnstone, Sarah Corsie, and Malaika Aleba at Caitlin Press for mad skills and their trust in me; Kate Braid for being the messenger; Cindy Hutchison, Helen Mavoia, Sherry Marr, and everyone on the Tofino Poet Laureate working group; Maureen Fraser and the Tofino Arts Council for generous support; Janice Lore for a link to sanity; Kathleen Shaw, Joanna Streetly, Yvonne Blomer and Catherine Owen for advice and opinions keenly sought; the Clayoquot Writers' Group, always; Ann-Marie Metten and Historic Joy Kogawa House's Wednesday Writing Group; Vancouver's Word Festival goddesses; Daniela Elza; Signy Cohen; Anita Sinner; Christine Wiesenthal; Beth Wilks; Pilar Bobadilla de Izzard; Peter Langer; Warren Rudd. Cover artist and friend, Mark Hobson; his whiz assistant Rino del Zoppo. Thank you, generous donors to the Tofino Poet Laureate program: Barb Campbell, Gary Shaw, Common Loaf Bake Shop, Crystal Cove, District of Tofino, Epic Pharmacy, Kim Hoag, Mermaid Tales Bookshop, Coastal Community Credit Union, Dr. James Jameson, Method Marine Supply, and Storm Light Outfitters. To every poet who submitted, whether your work was accepted or not. And to my late mother for teaching me not just to love trees but also that trees are worth more standing, leaning, twisting, bending, reaching, mothering, and slowly dying while providing rich habitat for wildlife. Long live the remaining ancients. This book is dedicated to tree protectors and forest defenders on Tla-o-qui-aht and Pacheedaht territories. Indeed, to tree guardians everywhere on Earth: the only planet that grows trees, and the only planet, therefore, where we can live.

—Christine Lowther, January 2022

Connection



okimaw wahic – the Sacred Tree

Louise Bernice Halfe — Sky Dancer

I sat in a willow tarp lodge
alone in the forest.
Inhaled the sweet birth of leaves.
Looked at the deep black scars
that bled from the branches.

I wondered what agony the trees
felt to release
those black tears. I touched gently,
brought their taste to my mouth.

In a night-dream
I walked into a sparce sunlit room
four trees graced each corner.
In their arms a nest curled,
cradled against the winds.

Grey haired, wrinkled and saggy skin
I've been shown my birthplace
after I landed from the seven stars.
I was curled within the roots
of trees.
My arms are now thin twigs
that yearn
to hold my children,
my grandchildren.
This breath
a leaf living through spring,
maturing through the summer
falling in the autumn
brittle in the winter.
Nurturing the earth.

Roots Anchored

Sheena Robinson

In the coastal forest at dusk,
light fades to the hue of usnea lichen.
I sit amongst the ancient lady ferns
as they sing soft lullabies to the young fiddleheads,
their sweet tendrils curled like nautili.
I close my eyes and listen
to the underground conversations
between the trees, words vibrating
along fungal threads, a susurrating network
of mycorrhizal roots anchored
deep in time immemorial.
The shore pines prod the hemlocks:

*Do you see her?
Who does she belong to?*

*I've seen her here before.
The cedars claim her.*

I press my back against the one
who accepts me, knows my relatives,
drawing strength from her history.
She came here four thousand years ago,
to change the land and the way
the two-legged ones traversed it.
My hands knead at the carpet
beneath me, the green moss true
and porous enough to absorb my energy,
my life force, and the moon blood of women
who sat here before, their hands anything
but idle as they waited for the hunters to return.

*We remember, too. Her ancestors
sat here weaving spruce roots and telling stories.*

The stories are still here, lying
in layers of detritus on the forest floor,
feeding old relatives, resisting
decay and the weight of oppression.
My ancestors hold me up to the light,
like nurse logs cradling new growth.
Has it already been seven generations
or can I rest here for good, back against
a bark strip scar, healing yet proud.

Does she know?

*Not yet. Let her sit a little longer,
but not long enough to turn to stone.*

The alders watch with their many eyes
as the rain starts to fall and the earth lets
loose a long sigh and I inhale her lucid petrichor.

The Linden Tree

Jeevan Bhagwat

Your loveliness took root
inside me,
branched its way through my body
till my spirit cried out
with an aria of
linden leaves.

All this time
you watched over me,
ringed my years with
dendrochronology,
while my sapling dreams sprouted
and grew.

We, the Trees

Kathy Page

We, the trees, care not about one
or even several.

What matters is the sum of us,
and what matters is what passes
between the sum of us, and
what passes between the sum of us
and the sum of you.

And in time all of you will become us
and without us
there is none of it.