

Greetings from a Tree Being to a Human Being

composed on the occasion of a tree crew arriving to take down the oldest white oak in Old Ottawa South. With the crew standing by with their chain saws and shredders it seemed right for the City Councillor to ask the tree what she wished to say in her defence, April 5, 2007.

Welcome person
to my domain of wild flowers at my feet,
the sun and sky around my head.

I am alone now
in the side yard of a small clapboard house,
but my branches are still great arms
sufficient to hold the sky;
my trunk a powerful bellow
to all those who pass by.

Welcome small powerful person,
you are an amazing creature
that cannot be denied
you have taken all my brothers and sisters,
all my aunts and uncles, parents and grandparents
who used to stretch in an ocean
of great tree voices as far as the eye could see.

Who would have thought when I was nothing
but a poke above the forest floor,
dreaming of the day to come
when I might tower above all,
green cousin to the blue sky,
servant of the yellow sun,
brother of the brown earth

that one day I would be all those things,
but alone, the last of my kind;
the last to have a memory
of the time when we trees
ruled the earth
and the sunrise greeted only the voices
of the oak and the walnut,
hemlock and maple,
pine and spruce.
When the human beings
were no more important than
the wolf after a deer,
that you would one day cut us down
one after another, until it was we,
the oak and the walnut,
the hemlock and the maple,
the pine and the spruce
that had passed into memory.
but who's memory?
that is what I don't understand;
who will there be to remember us?

The memory of the white oak
is held by the white oaks.
The memory of the walnut
is held by the walnuts, and so it goes.
It is we trees that remember who we are;
who embrace the sun each day
and breathe life into the air.
It is we who create the forest roof and floor,
and scrub the air

from which life comes.

What is it you humans do?

Besides separate our hands from our arms,
our arms from our trunks,
our trunks from our roots,
our roots from the earth?

What do you humans do?

To make the earth, the earth?
To greet the morning sun?
To sigh away the dusk?
To perfume the sky?
To give life life?

What do you do?

(This white oak was given a 12 month reprieve from the cutters. The poem itself was read on C.B.C.'s national morning show with Pamela White, a neighbour of the tree.)

Composed by Clive Doucet