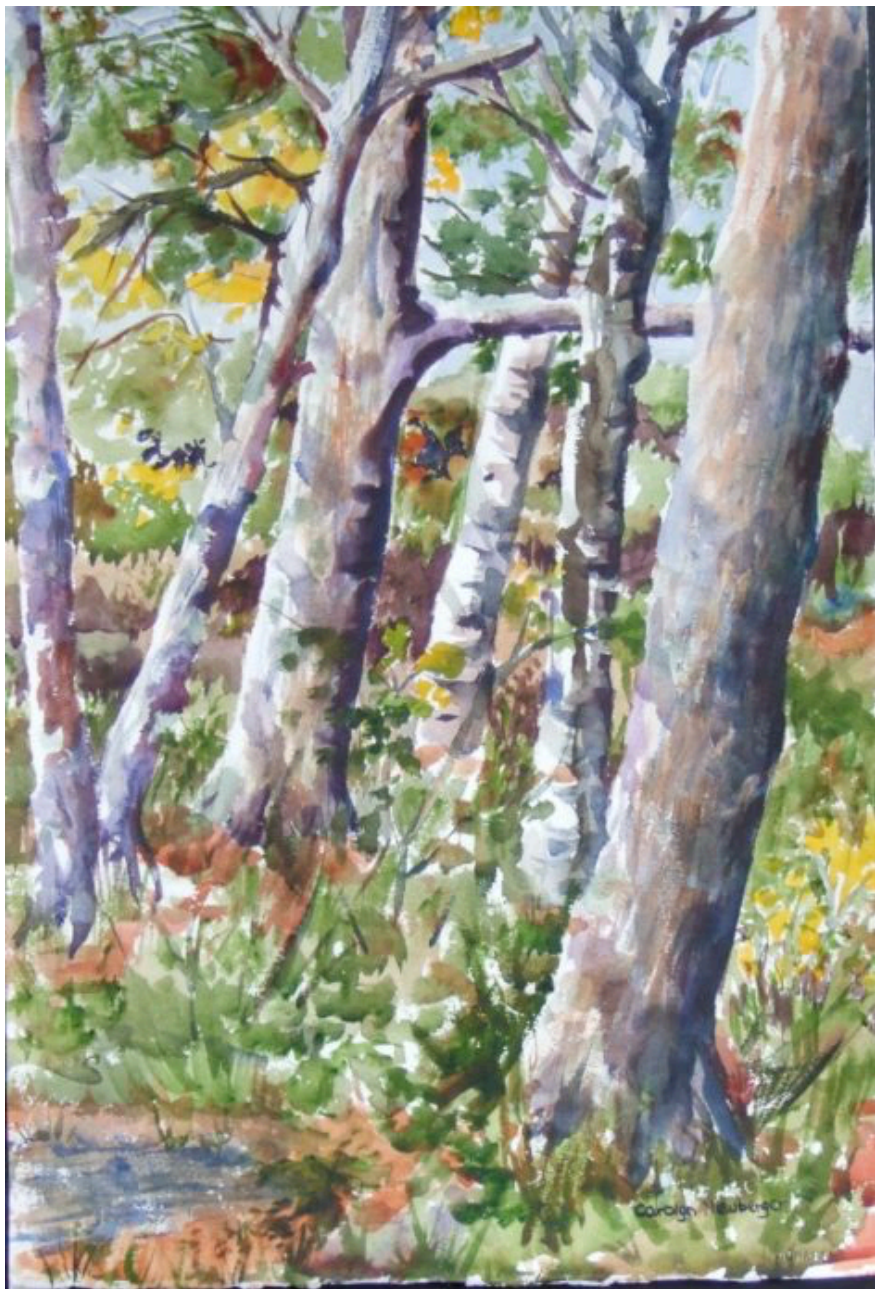
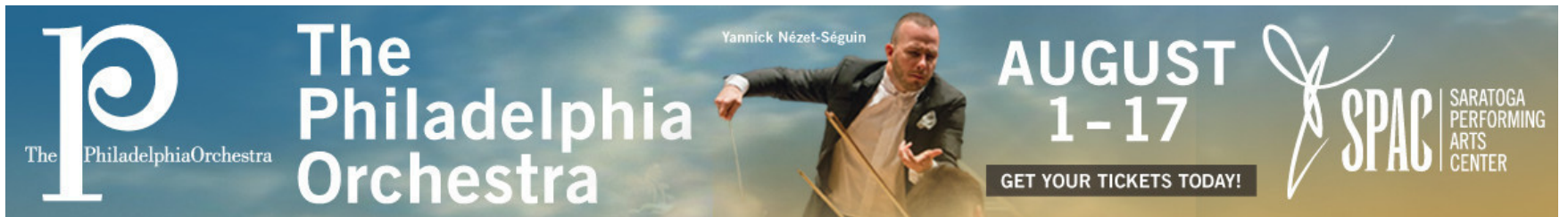


Illuminating the Hidden Forest,

Chapter 3: Ancestor trees

[Carolyn Newberger](#) Monday, Jul 1, 2019



Symphony of Trees. Painting by Carolyn Newberger

[Life In the Berkshires](#)

To read Chapter 1, [click here](#); to read Chapter 2, [click here](#).

June 16-18, 2018

This morning Lily awakened me from a dream. I rose reluctantly, a touch of sciatica this morning, and pulled on my insect shield pants and shirt from the basket on the floor.

I've been searching for the tree stump that I sketched two days ago, interrupted when Mike called my phone because a bear had gotten into the garbage can and strewn trash all over the street. In my haste to go help him clean up, my marker pen cap fell into the leaves and I couldn't find it. I went back yesterday and again this morning but haven't been able to find the stump, even though it was just behind the back cabin. Maybe it wasn't a tree stump, but a decaying downed log.

What I did find yesterday, instead, was a jumble of cut pieces of a giant tree, clearly downed long ago, and now sporting wild barnacles of scalloped gray fungi, and, low and behold, that already mentioned crescent of tiny tender white fans that turned out to be oyster mushrooms. Yesterday I took note of where I was, just off the path on the left, almost in sight of the cabin.

This morning, after the fruitless search for the stump and the marker cap, I decided to revisit my jumble of logs. I couldn't find them either! Nothing is where I think it is.

So on I trudged and Lily scampered. As we walked, the forest revived me, bit by bit, as my eyes scanned the cluttered leafy floor.

Another spiky downed hemlock caught my eye, and a path beyond, and then a grove of giant trees reaching to the sky through hemlocks living and dead and somewhere in between. Oaks. I recognized the leaves above and looked around. Multitudes of oaks were standing silently around me. I looked at my feet. I was standing on a mat of oak leaves.

Maple trees surround our house on the road. Many people consider even

big ones to be weeds. I sometimes think of maples as the wanton strumpets of the woods, flying seeds twirling through the air and sprouting everywhere. Oaks, in my mind, are tall, strong guardians, thoughtfully dropping their heavy acorns, deliberate and wise.



One of the oak trees in a forest of oaks. Photo: Carolyn Newberger

And now, unexpectedly, I have come upon a forest of oaks.

I caressed the trunk of the nearest tree. My tree. The one I first recognized. Or was it the one that first spoke to me?

I spoke back. "Hello, oak." I put my arms around it and lay my cheek on its rough bark and started to cry.

Why am I crying, I asked myself? Is it because of what I have lost: my marker cap and the crescent of tiny oyster mushrooms; my father, gone for so many years, whose evening beard was rough on my cheek at bedtime? Is it because within these losses great and small, I found the oak, ancient, sturdy and seemingly eternal? Maybe it's telling me, "Don't worry, I'm here."

On my way back I found the oyster mushrooms, not off the path at all. They were in the stretch of woods between where the path ends and the cabin begins, white and tender but so much bigger, growing into their plump fan shapes. Tomorrow I'll return. I'll remember.

Maybe.



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