

# Illuminating the Hidden Forest, Chapter 4: Embrace

[Carolyn Newberger](#) Friday, Jul 12, 2019





'Embrace.' Watercolor by Carolyn Newberger

[Life In the Berkshires](#)

*This is the fourth installment in a series. Also available are [Chapter 1](#), [Chapter 2](#) and [Chapter 3](#).*

**June 20, 2018**

Can trees embrace? Do they have feelings? Can they love each other?

This morning I came upon two white pines, one with its arms around the other, above an unmistakable kiss, burl to burl. These trees were growing out of a mound of entwined roots. Perhaps they are family, the embrace a slow-motion act of love, encircling over decades by now, perhaps over centuries in the future.

I think of children torn from their families on our southern border and elsewhere in the world even as I open my camp stool, pull my moleskin book, pen and waterbrush from my pack and begin the arduous task of observing.

How do I capture an embrace between conifers? Do I start from below, a tangle of dust, dirt, twigs, an occasional optimistic leaflet, out of which roots push and hump upward, narrowing into one solid trunk, then two, punctuated by encircling spines of lost branches? And then there is the swell of the embrace, the point at which two trees become one yet remain themselves, separate yet joined.

In "The Hidden Lives of Trees" (2013), Peter Wohlleben explains that trees live in families, connected underground by systems of roots that communicate through their own devices and, much as we use telephones to communicate with each other, through the devices of others.

Those other devices are the mycelia, the underground networks of mushrooms that carry messages from the root fibers of one tree to the root fibers of other trees. This means that when one tree is attacked, perhaps by beetles, a protective chemical response is carried into the neurofibers of

the attacked tree's roots. That information then transmits through mycelium webbing in the soil and into the roots of nearby trees. Neighboring trees can then mount preemptive chemical defenses to protect themselves from the beetles invading their own bark and bodies.

So can trees communicate? Yes, they can. Can they love each other? I can only answer that question with another. What is love? Is it a feeling? Is it a behavior?

I certainly cannot rule out that trees have feelings. Remember the sensitive plants from the childhoods of those old enough to remember them? When touched, they furled their delicate fronds away from our fingertips. Clearly this is some kind of a feeling, though maybe not felt or expressed through mechanisms that are the same as ours. If love is a behavior, residing in how we show care, then is a tree that protects its neighbor, through whatever means, showing love?

Introducing **BerkshiresCalendar.com**  
YOUR LINK TO THE SEASON'S OFFERINGS

A print magazine from the Berkshire Edge — a companion to our fabulous online calendar. Take a peek [here](#)— and pick up a **FREE COPY** at stores, restaurants, and hotels in the Berkshires and beyond.



## MORE STORIES





[\*\*CAPITAL IDEAS: GPS for 'the GE': Marco Polo?\*\*](#)



[News](#)

[\*\*Skateboarding Great Barrington teen struck in crosswalk\*\*](#)



[Viewpoints](#)

[\*\*EDITORIAL: West Stockbridge leads in publicly condemning hate, racism, white supremacy\*\*](#)