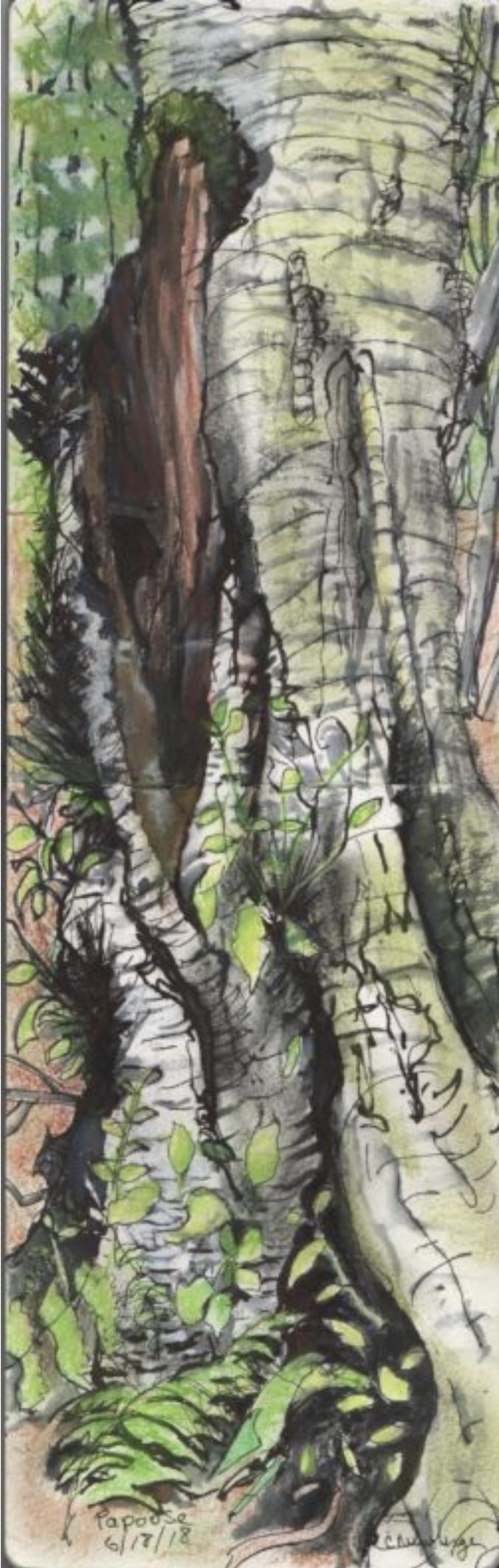# Illuminating the Hidden Forest, Chapter 8: Papoose

[Carolyn Newberger](#)   Saturday, Aug 17, 2019

Papoose. Watercolor by Carolyn Newberger

[Life In the Berkshires](#)

July 28, 2018

It's my mother's birthday, and I found a papoose. My mother would have been 106 years old today, an age unlikely, but not impossible, to imagine. How did the forest know to lead me to a papoose on this of all days?

Let me describe the papoose. Off the corner of my left eye, I spied a substantial black birch, *betula lenta*, its limbless trunk horizontally striated as birch trunks often, but not always, are, and simultaneously decorated with peeling bark ringlets, kind of like a relaxed Afro.

Surprisingly, the roots, where they emerged from the ground and joined the trunk, were embracing a papoose, held tightly to the body of the tree. The papoose was wrapped in a bark blanket, from which her shoulders and head emerged — a rather long and woody head, but a head nonetheless — capped by a tangle of mossy hair. Her blanket sported several prickly bulges, like pincushions of spiky sticks, while small, tender ferns grew at her base.

I could see myself in this little papoose, a bit headstrong and cantankerous, and my mother in the tree, holding firmly, trying to sooth her irritable child.

Many decades ago, when my mother complained to the pediatrician that my whole body quivered when I cried, the pediatrician replied, "They grow up to be interesting adults." I wish I could ask my mother, now safely in her own eternal bed, whether the outcome was worth the effort of raising this prickly child.

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