Evolution of Roots

Robin Eileen Browning

The University of Montana

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EVOLUTION OF ROOTS

By

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Professional Paper

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Evolution of Roots

Chairperson: Karen Kaufmann

Committee Members: Jim Kriley and Dorothy Morrison

Somewhere a seed was planted long ago. It grew, changed and developed. It was sheltered, nurtured, fed and pruned. This seed took form, evolving to become a tiny sprout. The sprout was exposed to warmth and rain, time and sometimes pain, a process lending to further maturation. This in turn, once again, changed the youngster to a young sapling. Education, unfamiliar concepts, and exposure to new and different areas and elements developed this young sapling into an adult tree. This process of evolution was to record a lifetime of growth. The growth rings would expose times of great nourishment, times of trauma and drought and times of renewal and vigorous growth.

This tree would evolve from seed to sapling to young adult, and finally to a fully mature tree. The evolution of growth would take time. With time would come knowledge, and with knowledge the tree would at last realize the stability and wisdom her roots possessed. She would find that her roots were capable of maintaining her through a life of trials and uncertainties, and through a lifetime of pleasures and development.

For me the metaphor of a tree was the foundation of this project. There was no precise moment that it came to me. For many years I have been drawn to and entranced by this mysterious, living, surviving form. As I researched, my eyes were opened to intriguing comparisons between my artist’s life and the growth process of a tree. These similarities could not be mistaken for mere coincidence. The dim awareness with which I began this journey would evolve with each new tree rendezvous. These encounters would come in the form of research, interviews, observations, music, photographs, and finally layering all the elements together into a film format for viewing. This wisdom filled form would lead me down the path I needed to travel in order to rediscover my artistic realm. As a young sprout struggles and pushes its way through the dark depths of the soil, so I had to push and fight my way through my own darkness. With these trees leading me, I would become tantalized by the similarities, correlations, and eventually clarity I would uncover in the growth and death of a tree, and how it all traced my journey as an artist.

And so this journey has taken me from the seeds of my past to the vision of my future to come. This is the life of a tree. This is the evolution of an artist’s dance. This is the growth and development of me.
For
My Ninety-two year old Grandmother
Edith Shirley Bacon

Who encompassed my roots
with unending love and encouragement always,
My inspiration forever!

Fig. 1, Twinkling Leaves, 2007
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Evolution is a process of change. My evolution toward a master’s degree and the life changes I have experienced along the journey would not have been possible without the support of a root system that is deep and strong. This system has been embedded, nourished and strengthened by many wonderful people throughout my life. I am a tree dancing a dance inspired by the impact these people have had on my life.

My journey began with an elementary teacher, Waneta Harris, who expected great things from me, held me accountable, and made me believe my tiny seed could one day grow into a giant oak. Doni Andregg, who in his unassuming way, led by example to instill in me a fun and creative atmosphere where learning was a delight. He was also my personal translator in my inability to understand algebra. He made it clear. Dan Webster, my friend and teacher. This man taught me I was valuable just for me and pushed me to excel. He explained in all seriousness that I should be happy to have a bat flying around my house; this was a great opportunity for study. Ken MacKintosh, an amazing artist and educator who inspired me, challenged me, and made me laugh from day one in his classes, even though his intent was to intimidate, he completely endeared himself to me. This is the man who enticed me into the world of abstract art that I will forever find intriguing. He was the first person to hold me accountable to develop my skills and push me far beyond what I ever imagined I was capable of. James Kriley, a man I deeply respect and admire, who through a random class gave me the courage and desire to step tentatively back into the world of art again. He constantly inspires me to look, dig deep,
analyze and expand who I am for the sole purpose of who I am. And finally, Karen Kaufmann, who expected great things of me once again, laughed with me, encouraged me, lit a fire in my heart, drove me to complete what only she saw I was capable of doing when all that I could see was a twisted and consumed carnage of a once vibrant tree. She saw the “me” that I could no longer see, and relentlessly encouraged and pushed me to achieve to my potential. Liz Geary, my fabulous, creative invaluable messenger who walked me through endless computer difficulties and aided and inspired me to laugh when I was in tears, and was my final accomplice in creating hair and face designs for the final shooting of this project. I owe her a debt of gratitude which can never be repaid. Then there are my mother and grandmother who stood steadfastly beside me, and sewed the costume creations that I envisioned. And also, my family, Jody, my husband who is, through this paper seeing a different person than he has seen through the years, and becoming willing and aware of the changes that are necessary for growth in both of us. I could never have made all the correlations between my growth and that of a tree without his knowledge and love of forestry. And finally, my darling children, Sahara, Gabrielle, Zayne and Dylan, who lost many hours of time with their mother, and spent many hours traipsing down unknown roads and byways in search of another tree. They will always be the reason that I pursue my dreams, so they too will be inspired and acquire the knowledge that they need to pursue their own. These are my roots and my legacy.

“Some people come into our lives and quickly go. Some people move our souls to dance. They awaken us to new understanding with the passing whisper of their wisdom. Some people make the sky more beautiful to gaze upon. They stay in our lives for awhile, leave footprints on our hearts, and we are never, ever the same.”
(anonymous). To these phenomenal people who have invested their lives in mine, there are not adequate words to express my thanks. They are the roots that gave me wings again. Because of them I am discovering again the teacher, artist, and dancing tree that I am intended to be.
“Time-honored, beautiful, solemn and wise.
Noble, sacred and ancient
Trees reach the highest heavens and penetrate the deepest secrets of the earth.
Trees are the largest living beings on this planet.
Trees are in communion with the spiritual and the material.
Trees guard the forests and the sanctified places that must not be spoiled.
Trees watch over us and provide us with what we need to live on this planet.
Trees provide a focal point for meditation, enlightenment, guidance and inspiration.
Trees have a soul and a spirit.”

-Tree Magick by Lavenderwater

Fig. 2, Goddess, 2007

## ILLUSTRATIONS

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Introduction

A tree. Webster’s Dictionary defines this organism as, “a large, woody perennial plant with one main trunk and many branches.” This definition seems to lack the element of inspiration that many notable poets, musicians, and authors, along with myself have drawn from this one trunked organism of branches, bark, leaves and life. Scientists study it. World myths and legends are formed around it. Writers draft stories about it, and singers sing to us of it. Poets are inspired to tears by it. Animals find home and refuge in it, and children find comfort and endless hours of joy in its’ enveloping branches.

I, like so many others have found a connection to this abstract, yet cyclical form of nature. Like a tree, my history has been printed and my rings marked. This paper is the evolution of my connection to trees. Somehow my roots are intertwined, my heritage touched, my very soul distinguished by this living form. This “evolution, or process of unfolding,” is the quest. In search of the essence of an artist, me, I begin this journey. This document is my recitation of growth and development through a lifetime, and through a tree.

An artist-friend wrote the following ode to a tree. This poem begins to detail the path that I have followed. It starts to chronicle the history that I have sought to uncover and the past tales I have discovered. It is the beginning of a tree tale of my own.
The Craftiness of Time

With each ring, a tale
When one stops to listen
    History painted
Within intricate lines & finite edges

    Marked by years
Deep etches in the very heart
    Memories carved
Through the delicate coarseness

    A star bursts within
Sculpted from the past
Like the defining wrinkles of a Grandmother
    Aged by experience

Time’s stunningly elegant
    Malleable medium

Chris Russell, 2007
Fig. 3, Entangled, 2007
Chapter 1

The Intent

“We are called upon to do something new, to confront a no man’s land, to push into a forest where there are no well-worn paths and from which no one has returned to guide us. This is what the existentialists call the anxiety of nothingness. To live into the future means to leap into the unknown, and this requires a degree of courage for which there is no immediate precedent and which few people realize.”

-Rollo May

“Great trees grow from the smallest shoots; a terraced garden, from a pile of earth, and a journey of a thousand miles begins by taking the initial step.”

-Lao-Tzu

During the past two summers in the Creative Pulse program, I have been invited to revisit my artist roots. I have been required to push, confront and leap into the unknown. In the risk, rigor, and irrevocability, I have discovered the roots of this research project. My pursuit of the study of digital photography was done with the intent of answering several questions about me as an artist.

1. What is the essence of me as an artist? What are my roots?
2. How have I evolved as an artist? Why has there been such a lack of growth during the past twelve years?
3. How will I continue to evolve as an artist?

As I began contemplating these ideas, a tertiary question kept forming: Why were trees seemingly what I needed to research in order for me to find my evolutionary roots? Why was I so drawn to this natural form?

Thus my intent in this research project is dual in purpose. First, to find my path as an artist throughout my life; and second, to document this growth process through a

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study of digital photography and finally a multi-media presentation showing the layers of evolution that I have come through.

Fig 4, Enchanted, 2008
Chapter 2

SEEDS FROM THE PAST

“Once there was a tree….and she loved a little boy”\(^3\)

_Shel Silverstein_

“If you don’t know the trees you may be lost in the forest, but if you don’t know the stories you may be lost in life.”\(^4\)

_Anon_

The trees in my life have come in varied forms. My seeds, my deep roots, started long before me. My search had to begin with my roots. I needed to step away from myself and seek the essence of my ancestry, and the seedlings of my artistry. I began this search with my heritage.

My roots were taking shape in the 1600’s when my fearsome Irish ancestors journeyed to a new continent seeking a better way of life. My roots grew deeper as they struggled and worked to survive, grow and flourish through the hardships of relocation. They were survivors, explorers and adventurers. These were people of great endurance, pride and strong ties to clan. They were identified by their various art forms, from Aran sweaters to family crests. Here I connect with a proud, persistent part of my bloodline.

Then there came the roots that developed and grew from a native people. They were a strong, dignified people called the Chippewa. These were hunters, gatherers, artists and survivors. Driven from the frigid northern elements of Canada by the French, they found their way to Michigan, Minnesota and North Dakota. They planted seeds and


harvested to survive. They fought the Sioux and Fox tribes and remained strong. They produced art and developed a culture of myth and story, visual art and oral heritage.

These are the roots that hold me; this is the life-blood that runs through my veins. This is my very beginning, before me.

Then the roots branched out. These roots drew me closer to my great grandparents. These were families with roots embedded deep in the sun parched, cactus infested, wind blown sands of eastern Montana. Work worn hands, wrinkled leathery skin, dusty cowboy hats, buckin’ broncs and liquor-laden bars were the way of life, love and death. Trees were found in the graveyard shadowing the lives lived in this desolate badland.

Fig. 5, Guardian, 2007
Trees were found sheltering a homestead with branches held wide to welcome a weary rider home, inviting him to rest a while in the cool inviting shade of years of growth and dependability. These roots are speckled with art forms that developed out of necessity and for temporary relief from the everyday cares. These were riders, ropers and seducers of the animal world. Strength and stamina with a rope were essential. In the house, nimble fingers to knit socks, piece together patchwork-quilts, or embroider and tat works of art to decorate a home were elemental. The art of music and dance were embedded in this era and life style, developed to ease the never-ending work of each passing season.

These are my roots, my foundation, the seeds of my past…and then my parents. With that fiery Irish blood, and proud Chippewa intermingled with generations of Scottish, Dutch, Norwegian, French and English, they met and married with stories all their own; and art forms developed from their ancestors, yet applied to an ever changing new world.

My mother was a culinary wizard, creating masterpieces to dance and delight our tongues. We were the proud owners of designer clothing with my mother’s label attached, and we dreamed childhood dreams under the warmth knitted in the loving stitches that encompassed us. She is still a doer, trying to make all aspects of life flow smoothly and comfortably for those around her, while sometimes the stress this induces in her is overwhelming.

My father was athletic and impatient. He pushed himself and he pushed us. He was an artist in his own right on the back of a bull or bronc. He was a creator of fine works of art on leather, and he was always exploring, asking questions and making new
discoveries in his art forms and in his personal life. He continues to be a seeker, and inspiration. He is truly a scholar of God’s world.

And then came me. My DNA was printed and predetermined by a long history from the past. It was revealed by Irish voyagers; tough, fiery, and unpredictable. My development would be predestined and intertwined with the leaves of honor, art and war of a people who called themselves, Anishinabi, which means “original person.” This held a striking connection from my past to my future. Who is this “original person” that I am seeking?

Like a landmark that evokes such a sense of place, there is this same steadfastness and dependability about a tree. The early development of my place was beginning. It was deeply embedded in roots from my past. W.B. Yeats expresses it in this way, “Though leaves are many, the root is one.”5 James Kriley stated, “The tree will not come to you, you must go to it.”6 I determined to seek out my tree, and learn from the wisdom that I would find there.

As I connected more to my ancestors, the stories, the art, the people, I began to realize that to define my place, to seek my complete evolution, through my heritage, I had stumbled upon the conception of my essence. At this point, who I was remained only an undefined notion. My search was not complete. In fact, it was only just beginning. With the connection to my past, to the deeply embedded roots from my ancestors, I questioned even more, where would I find my tree? Where would I find me?

Fig. 6, Solace, 2008
This question continued to haunt me as I sought to photograph trees that spoke to my soul, and brought new insights to the forefront of my thinking. During the early morning explorations for a new image, or a late night journey through the blackness, I was able to begin to put thoughts and images together and formulate new inspirations for my artwork, and for my personal evolution. Where the journey would lead I could not tell, but the path was definitely producing stimulation and thoughts for my future.

Fig. 7, Uninhibited, 2008
Chapter 3

The Sapling

“A seed hidden in the heart of an apple is an orchard invisible.”\(^7\)
-A Welsh Proverb

“Do not be afraid to go out on a limb…that’s where the fruit is.”\(^8\)
-Anonymous

“Our ordinary mind always tries to persuade us that we are nothing but acorns and our greatest happiness will be to become bigger, fatter shinier acorns; but that is of interest only to pigs. Our faith gives us knowledge of something better; that we can become oak trees.”\(^9\)
-E.F. Schumacher

With the uncovering of my heritage, I began to analyze and realize that for many long years, I had believed that, “…becoming a fatter, shinier acorn,” was my destiny. But as I contemplated this thought, I realized my thinking had not always been this way. At some point I believed I could “become the oak tree.”

As a child I was unstoppable. I was energetic, intelligent and athletic, free from all boundaries that boxed me in and labeled me. I ran in the sunshine, skied in the pure pristine powder, drew to my heart’s content, and played endlessly with my little brother. We explored, jumped bikes, and flew through space, turning back flips out of swings. Through this period of growth, I felt few limitations to the possibilities and potential that I possessed. I could do anything I set my mind to. I was nurtured, loved and encouraged. I observed my grandmother’s various fine needle art forms, I wore my mother’s sewing and knitting pieces, and I was amazed by the leatherwork that my father produced. And I drew…and I wrote…and I relished life. My growth rings during this period of


Fig. 8, Childhood Delight, 2008
development reflected the sunlight, rain and nutrients that I was absorbing. This little sapling was thriving and maturing in an environment conducive to growth. My sense of place was taking shape as I grew. My expansion of self was developing through the consistency of the relationships and interactions around me. I was blessed with feelings of autonomy as my family interacted with me and encouraged me to expand and use my roots to spread my wings. All these life components, the nurturing, pruning, and care continued into my formal elementary education.

I was enrolled in a small private school where I attended a multi-grade classroom, with an instructor who had high expectations for my learning. She was gentle, calm and reassuring and my growth as a young sapling continued in uninterrupted glee. I loved school. I drew in every bit of sunshine and nutrient that came my way. I added ring after ring to my fast growing trunk. My capacity to do things on my own was great. I felt no fear in self-initiative, and easily transitioned into the stage of tolerance. I knew what I wanted to be. I saw things I wanted to do and did them. I saw injustice and stepped out boldly to right it. My learning environment was rich. I was comfortable, loved and accepted. My creativity flowed. I filled diaries with poetry, and sketchbooks with endless pages of my ideas. I explored and read and wrote epic novels. I learned to play football, out-ran the boys, wore faux leather pants and luxuriated in my sense of self. I had happily arrived at what Sheldon White and Alexander Siegel refer to as, “...the somewhat pleasant, but scary, destiny of small children to be faced constantly with the task of going to where they have never been before, of meeting and dealing with people they have never seen before, of doing things they have never done before. In a new environment, they have to arrive at emotional and social settlements before they begin to
enter into the problems and processes of intellectual problem solving. They have to ask, ‘Can somebody like me be here?’ ‘Can I trust the people here?’ ‘Can I trust myself to manage what I have to do?’”¹

I loved the tree that I was becoming. I had no fear of “going out on a limb,” that was where I relished being. My environment, my hardy Montana attitude, combined with the fiery Irish temperament and my proud Chippewa blood were mixing and mingling, bringing about the evolution of a very independent, tremendously patriotic, strong willed, self-defined artist. “I had the World on a String,”² and I was enjoying every moment of it!

Fig. 9, Backyard Playground, 2007

Fig. 10, Family Ties, 2007
Chapter 4
“…Knot of Roots”

“A man is a bundle of relations, a knot of roots whose flowers and fruitage is the world.”
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

“The Pine tree seems to listen, the fir tree to wait: and both without impatience: they give no thought to the little people beneath them devoured by their impatience and their curiosity.”
-Friedrich Nietzsche

“There are two trees, each yielding its own fruit. One is negative…it grows from lack of self-worth and its fruits are fear, anger, envy, bitterness, sorrow – and any other negative emotion.

Then there is the tree of positive emotions. Its nutrients include self-forgiveness and a correct self concept. Its fruits are love, joy, acceptance, self-esteem, faith, peace…and other uplifting emotions.”
-Kathi’s Garden

My journey to this point was growth, growth, growth. With the tenacity of a tree I had thrived. My seed, roots and sprout were growing at a rapid rate. However these dancing branches that were reaching ever outward, were to take a turn in a different direction. My sense of self would experience a bit of shaking.

A tree can seed itself, sprout, root and continue to grow with little or no interference from any human presence. It clings to life with a vitality that is spectacular. It can be found growing virtually anywhere, and can survive the most brutal of elemental forces. Somewhere in the world at any given moment, a tree is tried by heat, fire, wind, rain or drought. By some innate force it will overcome and grow despite these

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(February 27, 2008).
circumstances. Sometimes its’ growth is in a completely altered form. The tree may be twisted and warped by the elements around it. Or it may develop through the elements with an elegance and beauty even more engrained by the trials. Through the most drastic of changes, the tree’s roots hold stubbornly to keep it in place.

I was at a point in my education process that I was questioning everything, especially myself, and where I fit into the larger picture of life and the world around me. I had “…been in the very warm, secure world of childhood….and life was pretty rosy and comfortable…Unfortunately, however, you can’t just suddenly mature. First you have to wiggle out of your secure world of childhood, and that is where the difficulty often begins.” As my exposure to broader educational experiences and more people developed, my sense of security and self-worth did not keep the same rapid growth rate as it had. Up to this point, the sapling had been exposed to a very controlled environment. It felt like a greenhouse. I had been surrounded by every element that helped me to develop and grow. Any negative forces had been minor and similarly very controlled.

It was at this juncture that I was to experience phenomena that I was not prepared for. “Getting to know something is an adventure in how to account for a great many things that you encounter in as simple and elegant a way as possible. There are lots of different ways of getting to that point, and you don’t really ever get there unless you do it, as a learner, on your own terms.” I had been exposed, by my home culture and my school culture, to a delicious experience in freedom to grow. I was growing in many different areas of my life. However, I did not realize that all the changes that I was going

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6 Dr. James Dobson, Preparing for Adolescence (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1989), 14, 15.
through were also changes that the majority of my peers around me were also experiencing. My preparation for adolescence had not been thoroughly addressed, so as I made my transition into high school, my expectations were a bit skewed. I was excited to enter this stage of my life, but I was not prepared for the deep questioning and definite discord that I would experience. In the pursuit of education, and the natural process of development, in an adolescent, freedom and creativity do not flow freely or at the same rate with all people. I found that while I wanted to eagerly pursue new arenas, those around me did not see the world through my eyes. The freedom and creativity that I desired were not elemental values to everyone. While I was open to varied learning and methodologies, while I desired to interact with various people and cultures, and while I delighted in anything new and out of the ordinary, I was somewhat mystified by the discovery that not everyone was comfortable with my desire for the unknown. Quite the contrary, some and actually many, were more inclined to fiercely guard the status quo. To be the one to break the canonical was not looked on with favor. However, there was a constant internal struggle of my soul. While I wanted to pursue my own ways, and depend on my heritage of a strong root system to empower me to do so, I at the same time wanted to fit into the culture around me. This struggle continued through high school creating tension in my existence, yet allowing me also not to be troubled by being the breaker of the canonical and experiencing life the way I wanted to. I held firmly to what Rollo May described. “The creativity of the spirit does and must threaten the structures and presuppositions of our rational, orderly society and way of life. Unconscious, irrational urges are bound by their very nature to be a threat to our rationality, and the anxiety we experience thereupon is inescapable.”

continued to play out in different areas of my life. I made different choices from the norm, constantly. I decided early in my life that I did not want to drink alcohol or party. This was not an extremely popular decision in high school or college. I continued my vegetarian lifestyle, and always was concerned with health issues, being active, eating well, limiting or completely excluding caffeine, and making a conscious decision to be strong physically.

Because my school had no varsity program when I attended, I obtained permission to play men’s intramural sports. Against all odds, I ran for Senior Class President and won the election without being present during the elections. I graduated wearing the black robe of the young men rather than the red robe the young ladies wore. Through this developmental period I was testing and trying things my way.

One day during English class, our instructor had been driven to such a point of frustration with several of my classmates and me, that she told us if we did not want to be in class we should just leave. That seemed like a wonderful invitation to us, and we left. To our surprise and consternation, the next day we found that our freedom of choice to leave class was not accompanied by our freedom of choice to return to class. Instead we were invited to have a private visit with the principal, where upon we learned that our freedoms were limited by other’s framework of ideas on what proper respect and classroom behavior looked like. Each passing day held a new insight into cause and effect, freedom of choice and the natural consequences that accompanied these choices.

My constant sketching, doodling and writing had its’ own difficulties at times, too. I recall being kicked out of class for drawing while a teacher was lecturing. He told me that I was not paying attention in class, so I might as well not be there. My sense of
justice was injured, and my level of respect for this man deteriorated as I was required to take his class. I learned that flexibility in learning and understanding the multiple intelligences were undoubtedly not his strong suit. At almost any cost, I was willing to risk much to gain in my search for self. I was beginning to understand just how much I valued my freedom of choice and creativity, and I would rather risk the threat of unknown consequences, than lose the right to freely choose.

My strong willed desire for difference continued into college where I discovered a much more open environment in some areas. Of course the institution frowned upon my initiative to become the Men’s Club President. Such boundaries and closed minds I was not at all ready to accept without a good fight. Armed with a petition that was filled with male signatures, I announced my intent to run for this office. I had determined and let my opinion be known, that I should at least be allowed the opportunity to run, and let the men of the club decide if I was an eligible candidate that they would like to have as their President. The undisputable decision of the ruling body was, “NO!” In my thinking, I argued that the men should at least be given the opportunity to choose for themselves. In retrospect, I am sure that what I viewed as my rights might actually have caused a great deal of chaos and unrest to occur in the men’s residence halls.

Through all the searching, the young tree was growing, putting down more roots, building ring after impertinent ring of new growth; some through adversity and trials, and some through an environment that was alimentary and stimulating.

During this period of time I realized remarkable change in my ability to be secure in who I was without the approval of my peers. I could dress, look and create my own image. I could form friends from different cultures, date men from diverse populations,
be comfortable and enjoy the experience. I could play every sport available, explore and experience education from many perspectives, and be with peers and professors who motivated me and enjoyed the journey right along with me. This was an astounding period of growth. The rings were wide and healthy, basking in the sunlight, and happily producing life-giving elements to all around. It was a time of self-discovery and redefinition. I was pushed to pursue athletics at a much higher level than ever before; I was propelled to theorize and apply it in areas of education and psychology, and I was driven to expand my knowledge base and ideas in the realm of art. Once again, I was in an environment that encouraged higher level thinking, searching and exploring. I was back in my element, and the young sapling was stretching her branches toward greater maturity. I was “living out of my imagination.”

I had begun to realize my essence on my own as a woman coming into her own. I was teetering on the reality that Anne Morrow Lindburgh writes of, “Woman must come of age by herself. This is the essence of ‘coming of age’ ----to learn how to stand alone. She must learn not to depend on another, nor to feel she must prove her strength by competing with another. In the past, she swung between these two opposite poles of dependence and competition of Victorianism and Feminism. Both extremes throw her off balance; neither is center, the true center of being a whole woman. She must find her true center alone. She must become whole. She must, it seems to me, as a prelude to any ‘two solitudes’ relationship, follow the advice of the poet to become ‘world to oneself for another’s sake.”

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As I look back, I now realize I really did believe I was coming into my own. In some small degree, I was. At this point my perceptions and my level of exposure to real life elements were severely limited. My self-realization was not complete, but in my sapling state I could see that my ability to perceive any obscurity was extremely impaired. This new confidence allowed me to step confidently, if not utterly blindly, into the next phase of my life. I felt unshakeable. Borrowing words from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, I felt this same exuberance toward life, as the young hero writes in his journal, “Welcome, O life!”

Fig. 11, Roots, 2008

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Chapter 5

Dancing Partner?

“God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand tempests and floods. But He cannot save them from fools”
- John Muir

“Except during the nine months before he draws his first breath, no man manages his affairs as well as a tree does.”
- George Bernard Shaw

“Beloved, gaze in thine own heart,
The holy tree is growing there;
From joy the holy branches start,
And all the trembling flowers they bear.
The changing colours of its fruit
Have dowered the starts with metry light;
The surety of its hidden root
Has planted quiet in the night:
The shaking of its leafy head
Has given the waves their melody,
And made my lips and music wed, Murmuring a wizard song for thee.”
- William Butler Yeats

“Trees are poems that earth writes upon the sky,
we fell them down and turn them into paper,
that we may record our emptiness.”
- Kahlil Gibran

My dance would change once again. My college days were filled with art, athletics and education. My creative and athletic pursuits were never at a loss. Any free time I might have was filled with studying and working. My last quarter at school, I

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worked forty hours per week, crammed in twenty-one credit hours, played basketball and
met my husband to be. I graduated, took a teaching job, got married and had a baby all in
the course of one year. I moved from my hometown in Montana to my husband’s
hometown in Washington. Changes were rapid and extreme for my tree growth. This
was to be an uprooting time in my growth formulation. I felt displaced and relocated into
an environment that was alien to me. My life was packed, but my emptiness was
overwhelming. I was feeling more “…of the state of ‘Zerrissenheit – torn-to-pieces-

Fig. 12, Dancing Partners, 2008

hood.’ She cannot live perpetually in ‘Zerrissenheit.’ She will be shattered into a
thousand pieces. On the contrary, she must consciously encourage those pursuits which
oppose the centrifugal forces of today. Quiet time alone, contemplation, prayer, music, a
centering time of thought or reading, of study or work. It can be physical or intellectual
or artistic. Any creative life proceeding from oneself.”  

16 Anne Morrow Lindburgh, Gift of the Sea (New York: Pantheon Books, 2005), 49.
The environment and elements around my tree were in a state of constant chaos. The sapling that to this point had been enjoying a controlled environment was suddenly bombarded by exterior influences that pushed and restricted the growth patterns. The rings were altered drastically by this unknown and unfriendly environment to which the young tree was subjected. I was unsure in my role as new wife and daughter-in-law. I was tried and worried by new family demands and schedules. I was stunted and caged by the lack of tolerance and acceptance that I encountered. I found myself in a place that I did not fit. My creativity and art forms were not understood or appreciated, and I felt as if my tree might topple. I was too young in my newly acquired confidence to fight the forces around me and thrive. I could not find a place of balance. Truly I did not even understand the need for that place of balance. I understood Rollo May’s reference completely when he wrote, “Obviously creativity and originality are associated with persons who do not fit into their culture.”

The branches that had so recently reached enthusiastically to the sunlight of growth now cowered and withered, twisted and tortured in a season of drought. My heart was altered and weakened as that of a tree overcome with heart rot. My whole self-concept experienced the rotting diseases that a tree experiences in its main stem when, “…windborne spores enter the trees via branch stubs, and pre-existing cankers and wounds.”

I was wounded by words. I was stunned by the lack of acceptance with which I was received. I was in a constant state of buffeting. Exposed to the cruel elements around me, I could not seem to find any place of safety and security. I allowed this

hostile environment around me to utterly alter the person I had so recently been. Coming from a community of artists who valued and supported me, who wanted me to succeed and realize my potential and find my own voice, I struggled to make sense of my new place of insecurity and fear. I had seen my creative self-realization in college, only to come into this milieu that so readily desired to squelch, alter, or completely decimate my leaf colors.

Yet as a tree, my true heart condition was difficult to detect. I was developing the capability to deceive those around me and effectively hide my wounds deep within. “The detection of heart rot diseases in a stand of trees can be difficult. They can be present in trees for many years before characteristic fruiting bodies are produced.”

My inner strength was broken down like the cellulose and lignin degeneration in a tree. I felt “stained and decayed,” as if the quality of me was “unmarketable,” undesirable, like that of a tree staggering from the affects of heart rot.

Looking back now on this stage of development, I realize that in actuality there was growth through this time of trauma and tears. It took me many years to realize that growth as a positive part of my life. I had not yet come to terms with the idea that, “The more personal harmony we feel the more we will be able to give in a loving relationship. All the elements necessary for a genuine, loving relationship with someone else are the same ingredients we need in order to fully love ourselves. Respect, confidence, good values, tolerance, open-mindedness, sincerity, benevolence – we share this inner contentment and self-love with someone. First, it has to be inside us. I must be sensuous and tender and intimate with myself before I can act that way with someone else. I must

love myself privately with no thought of reward so I can love and help someone else without being paid back. Loving is the reward.” Alexandra Stoddard states later, “When we marry we are in the state of becoming.”

So, like the tree that is in a constant state of renewal and growth, so was the woman I was becoming. However, I was no longer in an environment that I felt nurtured and loved. This was a proving ground. This was the time, when like a tree, I had to exist and survive without the aid of any outside sources. Could I struggle through the lack of nourishment, the fires of hell scorching my bark, the perpetual pounding of the environment around me, to become a stronger, more stable and grounded tree? Or, would I succumb to the forces around me? Would I become withered and twisted by too much wind, the infestation of disease and the parching soul thirst born by lack of water? Only time would truly tell.

I was still in a developmental “state of becoming.” I was not secure in myself through my own eyes, let alone through the eyes of a new husband and a critical mother-in-law. My search was really about surviving this place in time. Yet in retrospect, it was also another time of redefinition, pain and growth. I did not realize until the deep contemplation required for this project how much I had actually grown during this time span. I would survive and come through the adversity stronger from the experience. I would build stronger bark just as a tree that has adapted to fire by developing thicker bark. The tree, out of necessity, builds up a stronger defense for the next onslaught of fire. This new self-strength would be necessary to work through the next years of a rocky marriage. I would gain knowledge through this time that I could stand on my own. I would begin to decipher the skills I needed to stand up for myself, and set boundaries in

my life. This thickened bark would serve to establish the strength and stamina I would need to fall back on through the difficult trials ahead. The onslaught of wind, cold and drought could come and continue, and I could still survive.

Creativity and growth were pushed to far realms of my existence in the struggle for survival and retention of some semblance of sanity. During this dormant period, I felt as if my life was not my own, my time was for others, and any creative pursuits were minimal and minimized. My natural desire to grow and create was squelched but not destroyed completely. As with the Lodge pole pine tree that can only regenerate life with the heat of a forest fire, I now believe my tree had to go through these years of agony and uncertainty to get back to my solid roots once more. To really look at my life and evaluate what had been important to me and what continued to be important to me, I needed to access the reality of what someone else could fulfill in my life, and what I needed to proactively pursue on my own to fulfill my needs as a human, as a woman, as a wife, mother, and artist. I had to evaluate my life for the evolution that I desired. My tree may have become a bit battered and twisted from the journey, but suddenly through the process I realized that I did not have to remain that gnarled and dying shell of what I had become. I was not designed with love and care to rot as an acorn on the ground. Through my fires of hell, more seeds were produced and I could dance and dream and dare to create again, if only I had the courage to step out and try once more.

I realized that the information Dr. Kriley and Dr. Bolton kept bombarding me with was just what I really needed to evaluate and investigate more deeply. My “come to Jesus moment” was an evolution all its’ own, but now I discerned that, “When we see a
moment so filled with truth, we are completely empathetic and wowed.”21 I was wowed by the revelation that I could stop trying to be what others saw me as, and start being what I envisioned for myself.

I was coming to believe that it was time for me to heed the advice of Iian Shamir. I needed to:

“Stand tall and Proud
Sink your roots deeply into the Earth
Reflect the light of a greater source
Think in long term
Go out on a limb
Remember your place among all living beings
Embrace with joy the changing seasons
For each yields its own abundance
The Energy and Birth of Spring
The Growth and Contentment of Summer
The Wisdom to let go of leaves in the Fall
The Rest and Quiet Renewal of Winter”22

At last, out of the chaos of my life, as in Frackles Theory, I was finally emerging to find some order. Through all the endless searching and reading and “meaningless wandering,” I had come to a point of transformation. I, like the monarch in Kim Todd’s book Chrysalis, “…was perhaps the most improbable. Pale sea green with dots of gold, it looked like it should come in a blue box from Tiffany’s. The curators must have had an impeccable sense of timing; a new chrysalis broke open every minute, slow-motion fire-crackers….Behind the glass, a modest green pupa, slightly translucent, began to tremble. Anaria jatrophae, the white peacock, it was the same species Merian captured three hundred years ago in a cassava field. It shook more violently. Finally, the pressure too high, the skin ripped. The abdomen pushed forward, legs flailing through the gap.

21 Laurence Olivier, unknown source.
22 Iian Shamir, Advice From A Tree, compiled by Garafalo, “Trees II.”
Blood-colored fluid dripped from the ribbed thorax as the legs found purchase and the insect crawled out. It was hard to tell part from part in the glistening rush. Then it came into focus. Wings bulged like cheeks on either side of the thorax, and the insect turned to hang from the shell of the pupa, no longer pregnant and dark. There was something too quick and raw, almost obscene, about the split, the body shoving its way out. Now transparent and broken, the empty shell dangled, holding a shape that no longer existed, a memory of an earlier life.23

My “slow motion fire-cracker” was about to be lit. My transformation from chrysalis form would begin its’ process of transformation with my introduction to the Creative Pulse in 2003.

Fig. 13, Fuse, 2008

Chapter 6
Fragile New Beginnings

“What is the essence of the tree, unto itself?”

- James Kriley

“It is not the desert island nor the stony wilderness that cuts you from the people you love. It is the wilderness in the mind, the desert wastes in the heart through which one wanders lost and a stranger.”

- Anne Morrow Lindburgh

I had become lost in all my roles. Not the roles that I necessarily saw myself in, but the cages, and boxes, and bars others placed me in. The self image I had come to believe, due to the experiences of my marriage and the place I chose to stay and see myself were due to the fears of failure that I put on myself. So, the refashioning had to begin. The first seed thoughts of this change were planted during my brief exposure to the Creative Pulse in 2003. The seeds were fed and nourished as I read The Courage To Create, by Rollo May. I wanted to have that courage again. I wanted the freedom to bask in my creativity, the spontaneity to generate new works, to explore what I had shoved aside as a part of my life that was invalid, fanciful, and incomprehensible to others. At long last I saw a glimmer of hope that maybe these people really would understand. But then the struggle within myself to apply, to study for and actually take the GRE, haunted me on a daily basis. I was encouraged, yet I was still in the trembling, struggling stages of transformation. Struggling with the fear of failure, and desperately trying to find my place, I knew I needed change. I wanted to attend the Creative Pulse program, but the final stimulus that drove me to action came in a very basic form. I

would lose my teaching certification if I did not complete re-certification classes, or begin a masters program. At this point, I still could not do something just for me. This would be far too self indulgent and selfish. It was necessary for me to have a “reason” to make this choice valid in other people’s eyes. I needed an excuse to make it acceptable to spend that much time and money on my life. I had to have some outside factor to necessitate leaving my children and focus only on my selfish pursuits. My new growth was not completely dormant, but at best it was still twisted and negatively affected by my self-concept.

Fig. 14, Beauty Frozen, 2008
Chapter 7
Age Old Truths Discovered

“For to be a woman is to have interests and duties, raying out in all directions from the central mother-core, like spokes from the hub of a wheel. The pattern of our lives is essentially circular. We must be open to all points of the compass; husband, children, friends, home, community; stretched out, exposed, sensitive like a spider’s web to each breeze that blows, to each call that comes. How difficult for us, then, to achieve a balance in the midst of these contradictory tensions, and yet how necessary for the proper functioning of our lives. How much we need, and how arduous of attainment is that steadiness preached in all rules for holy living. How desirable and how distant is the ideal of the contemplative, artist or saint—-the inner inviolable core, the single eye.”

-Anne Morrow Lindburgh

I had finally been brought to a point through the Creative Pulse that I once again desired a different realm of growth. My struggle to survive in my marriage, with my children, and in my personal life, had left me feeling desolate, weary and forlorn. My life was overflowing with things to do, places to go, goals to accomplish. Yet my soul was as empty and desolate as the cactus infested wastelands of my ancestors. I had filled my life with activities to hide my truth. “…Instead of planting our solitude with our own dream blossoms, we choke the space with continuous music, chatter and companionship to which we do not even listen. It is simply to fill the vacuum. When the noise stops there is no inner music to take its place.” This is where I found myself coming back to the Creative Pulse in 2006. My resolve to finish was all that got me through the pushing, prodding and pruning of the first summer. I was in the painful process of risk, rigor and irrevocability, and my roots, trunk and branches were shaken as if by some unnatural power. This would be the shaking ground I needed to reawaken my dormant soul seeds.

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of the past. Through the fires of hell I found myself in, I would also find the survivor soul of my heritage. I discovered life did not have to be only about survival. Rather, it could be about dancing and drumming, and daring to step out and grow again.

Risks, I began to realize, are the brutal elements that surround me, and pummel me and push me and repel me. However, they are also the elements that could, if I would allow them to, cause me to dig my roots in deeper, to once again see the beauty around me, and immerse myself in these beauties and possibilities like I had not done for many years. “Risk always reveals rewards.” My rewards were definitely still to be seen.

Fig. 15, Electric Snow Picnic, 2008

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Chapter 8

Root Work for Dancing Leaves

“Good timber does not grow with ease, the stronger the wind, the stronger the trees.”

-J. Willard Marriott

“Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and precepts, they preach undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life.”

-Hermann Hess

“A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.”

-William Blake

And so, the root work led me to me. The tree that I saw at the beginning, twisted, diseased and dying, is not the one rejuvenated by new hope now. My vision has changed drastically. “For in the true nature of things, if we rightly consider, every green tree is far more glorious than if it were made of gold and silver.”

As I have photographed, and observed, and become more educated in different areas; as I have opened new books and old treasures, and read and re-read; as I have contemplated, read again, gone back over notes and ideas, spent sleepless nights thinking, and early morning hours chasing the ever dancing limbs and insights of another tree, I have begun to see the world around me in a different light. I have also once again begun to see the innate value of me, solely for me, unto myself. Lao-tzu said, ‘To be worn out is to be renewed.’ I am in the process of being completely worn out, and so looking

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forward to the hope of renewal. As this journey has progressed, I have experienced extreme disquiet of my spirit. I have endured the tremblings of uncertainty as my heart yearns to reach out to the new, and yet my known knowledge leads me to stay at the status quo, where at least I know where I am. This unknown element of myself as an artist and a tree that has tasted new life is a land I do not know my way through. As I inspect the world in relation to my life, as I search for the methods to become a seeker like my father and grandfather and my deep roots before me, I am realizing this is not an instant endeavor. Rather, “To be an artist is to believe in life.” 6 It is a process in itself to continue believing in myself, to continue challenging myself, to not give up on the process of being an artist even when I cannot see through the shades of gray depression that so easily overtake and envelope me. I have to continue to learn and lean on the roots that I have discovered I do have holding me. “Being an artist is not something we acquire or even complete. It is a way of life.” 7 I am still on my journey to find how I can have this way of life for my own.

To keep believing, to keep seeking, there has to be a constant effort for renewal. “But there is also a dead weight accumulation, a coating of false values, habits and burdens which blights life. It is this smothering coat that needs constantly to be stripped off, in life as well as in relationships.” 8 The bark of a tree sloughs off in a constant cycle of growth. As new cells grow and divide, the old cells die and strengthen the constantly changing, evolving tree. As the new cambium pushes out, the oldest bark falls away on the very outside. As in my life, the old had to fall away for the new to have room to

grow. However, the old growth had contributed to making me stronger as a growing changing tree. The bark serves as the protective coat, absorbing all the roughness and destroying elements around the tree. It can also be the smothering coat that through growth, must be stripped away in order for the new life to continue. There is no end, other than in death itself. I desire my legacy of art to endure as the bark of a tree. I hope that my seeking and soul searching will be transferred to another generation that will learn to value themselves, immerse themselves in the world around them, and love art in many different forms.

To be an artist, a dancer, a delighter in life, I must continually create the life that I desire. To pass this ability on to my children and my students I have to first find my tree, my rootedness, my inspiration and my way to stay healthy and alive. William Blake said, “The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way. Some see nature all ridicule and deformity, and some scarce see Nature at all. But to the eyes of the man of imagination, Nature is imagination itself.”1 I am only limited by my blinded eyes, by the self-imposed limitations that I implement for myself, by the heart rot that I actually allow to take hold in my soul. Appius Caecus states, ‘Each man the architect of his fate.’2 Homer unveils it in this way, ‘And what he greatly thought, he nobly dared.’3

My expansion as a strong rooted, strong willed artist will only cease to happen if I allow my environment to so alter me that I become, once again, only a hollow rotted out core. On the contrary, my intent is to indeed keep searching for the tree that I was

intended to become, to grow through the strong winds and become the strong timber that I can once again envision. I realize that this process may be filled with frustrations and hurricane forces that do not want to see me rooted and strong again. As I look to the future, I am determined to take the wise words of William Shakespeare, “Can one desire too much of a good thing?”⁴, and keep applying them and reapplying them in the cyclical process that I know I will experience. I want to see my journey and my development continue. With outstretched branches, I can once again believe what Robert Louis Stevenson says, “To be what we are, and to become what we are capable of becoming, is the only end of life.”⁵ My search for my tree is just beginning. My search for me is an adventure yet to be experienced and documented.

Fig. 17, Mystique, 2008

⁵ Alexandra Stoddard, *Daring To Be Yourself* (New York: Avon Books, 1990), 204.
Chapter 9
Vital Secrets Unearthed

“Because they are primeval, because they outlive us, because they are fixed, trees seem to emanate a sense of permanence. And though rooted in the earth, they seem to touch the sky. For these reasons it is natural to feel we might learn wisdom from them, to haunt about them with the idea that if we could only read their silent riddle rightly we should learn some secret vital to our own lives; or even more specifically, some secret vital to our real, our lasting and spiritual existence.”

-Kim Taplin

This segment of my journey has almost come full circle. I face this idea with a mixture of melancholy and intense uncertainty. Through the soul-searching, reading, and researching of this project I have found much stimulation and hope for the life that I would like to embrace. Yet I waver on the brink of overwhelming fear that I will never succeed in this reality that I desire. I realize how applicable the idea is that, “The pattern of our lives is essentially circular.” The pattern of drought, insects and disease in a tree also follows a cyclical pattern. As I look back over my life I see the cycle played and replayed. There have been high times of great growth, and wide, luxurious rings; and there have been times of intense pain, uprooting and heart rot. My growth will not miraculously alter from this cycle as thoroughly as I wish it would. On a daily basis I see myself having to juggle so much more than just my personal wants, needs and desires. These are the very things and the people that I fear have the capacity to keep me from my full potential, and in essence I then will never be able to share my heart, my art, myself fully with them, and have them share the benefit of the energetic, creative tree that I want to develop into.

Over the past twelve years, instead of finding the personal quiet, stimulus and creative time I needed for growth, I instead put everything else above my necessary elements for growth and health while meeting the needs of many around me. This is a rooted life style that I know and I need to change. These are diseased roots that have to be unearthed and replaced by new growth. While I have been forced through this project to immerse myself in reading and thought, photography and writing, I have also come to the conclusion that my growth, like a tree, will inevitably have times of immense growth, the creativity will flow from my heart wood, I will indeed have creative encounters, push myself to find stimulation, and ultimately reveal growth rings that speak this tale clearly. Rollo May expresses this cyclical process in this way, “The sexual metaphor indeed expresses the importance of encounter. In sexual intercourse the two persons encounter each other; they withdraw partially to unite with each other again, experiencing every nuance of knowing, not knowing, in order to know each other again.”

This is the relationship that I seek to build in so many arenas of my life. To really know myself first, in order to then establish a more healthy and complete relationship with my husband, my children, my family and friends around me. But I clearly see how this journey of a thousand miles not only starts with the first step, but the first step is completely up to me.

Through the course of this project, I have become much more comfortable with the idea of “…times of knowing and times of not knowing.” Nothing is permanent, but I ultimately have control of my life. I make choices, and I am learning that as Apollo gave counsel, I must thoroughly ‘Know Thyself.’ My cyclical process will not show growth rings that have all been nourished with the same care throughout time; however they will

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4 Alexandra Stoddard, *Daring To Be Yourself* (New York: Avon Books, 1990), 96
show growth throughout my lifespan. I, like Rollo May, see my creative new artist self, my evolving tree in this way. “Creative people, as I see them are distinguished by the fact that they can live with anxiety, even though a high price may be paid in terms of insecurity, sensitivity, and defenselessness for the gift of ‘divine madness,’ to borrow the term used by the classical Greeks. They do not run away from non-being, but by encountering and wrestling with it, force it to produce being. They knock on silence for an answering music; they pursue meaninglessness until they can force it to mean.” So then, instead of a life packed full of things, activities and schedules that are of little meaning, and dealing with the overwhelming emptiness of the life that I have created, I am searching for the first tiny seedlings of meaning to re-enter my life. I have discovered that if I give myself permission, I will forever be in a state of creative evolution. Discovery is a way of life, not an end of life. My path of truth has led me to the following conclusions that I have procured in order to help me stay on track as my tree continues to reach for more sunlight and growth.

Fig. 18, “Beauty from Pain”, 2008
I have discovered…

I have to make time for life…art, children, dance, quiet…

I cannot be deterred from pursuing my passions

Live life now!...Or I will miss out

Pay attention…to nature, time cycles, everything around me

Look! Really look at things

Have a journal always, and take the time to use it

Make lists…dreams, goals, and aspirations…

…Act on these things to make them happen

Catch my fleeting thoughts before they escape, because they will

I will not remember in the morning…

Do what inspires me

Read great authors…and new authors

Dream big dreams and have the courage to do something about them

Be spontaneous!

Forget the rules, and live out of my visions

Dance, listen to good music, travel, think, and be inspired

Do things now…waiting till tomorrow makes me miss “great shots”

Take time with my family, I lose my life when I don’t

There is so much potential for growth all around me…

Jump in and take full advantage of it all

Go cliff jumping again

Eat Dark Chocolate Raspberry Flavored Caramels for fun and for great thoughts

“One life. Many moments.” (Promises Message –Dove Chocolate wrappers)

Ask questions…lots of them

Surround myself with people who know more

Be stimulated to be creative

Never! Never! Stop learning and creating

Fig. 19, Iced Sunrise, 2008
Chapter 10
The Beginning Chapter

“As a little boy there was a period of time when I took refuge in a tree. I survived there in its highest branches.

Each day I’d come home from school like all boys do. Pausing at the front door with a lingering sense of yesterday’s nervousness, I would dump my books and lunch pail on the porch and head for the tree in the front yard. There were three boards I had strategically nailed to the trunk as hand and foot holds so I could reach the first branch. Gaining height with each successive maneuver upward, I felt better and better. I felt safe.

Near the top of the tree there were two strong branches that formed a comfortable cradle. There I would sit, sometimes for hours, just thinking. Actually, most of the time was spent feeling. Feeling thoughts I could hardly think. I didn’t really know what to think. My thoughts were nearly shapeless. But my feelings were very defined, and very strong. They were feelings of anger. Feelings of hatred. Feelings of deep desire for things to be different than they were…in that house down there that was supposed to be a home. Somehow I felt okay in the tree, in a sense, even thought it was the place where I faced my reality with the most acute pain. At least I was alone. At least I was separated from those sights and sounds which made my life nearly unbearable.

But as all boys must eat and sleep and do homework, I always came down from the tree. Mother would call and I would reluctantly climb back to earth, take a deep breath and walk through that door.”

This project has enabled me to study trees, photograph trees, connect with them and learn so many things from them through each stage of study and reflection, and finally to begin coming to terms with the tree that is me. If it were possible to analyze the ring growth of this tree that is me, I am certain that the past two years would exhibit phenomenal growth compared to the rest of my rings.

As I have observed, written, photographed, painted and planned, numerous and alternative ideas have come into clarity for me. I have read from an immense and varied group of resources, I have been blessed to speak with many different and knowledgeable people, and have accessed so many different web sites in my quest for understanding. I have read family history, located distant relatives and listened to stories and music from

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the past. I have recorded captured images of art-work from my mother, father, great uncle, grandmother and great grandmother. I have been awakened and re-awakened to old and new insights and ideas. Once again I am finding myself stimulated to search and seek and wonder and create again. I am still in the trembling stages of this development. It is not yet a ring that has developed fully, and is easily dismissed and damaged.

However, the realization that I need to pursue this part of me again in order to be whole is a new beginning. This has been a part of me that has been buried and dormant for many years. I never let myself even dream such a luxury of being able to put my creative visions back into realizations. Now I see the possibility is up to me. It may not be on the express route that I would choose, but the potential for growth is unavoidably possible.

However, even in the terminology itself, there is a conflict that is ever present. To determine whether this tension of my soul will be positive or negative is still to be lived and experienced. To be able to wrestle with my thoughts and feelings, the realities of my everyday life, and make a space for my tree is only in the awakening stages. The struggle for life is a continuous conflict.

As I have observed the form of many trees, so many revelations have been revealed. So many discoveries realized. I now see clearly my connection with trees, from the first small seeds, to sprout, sapling, solid trunk, and dancing branches and painted leaves of my own. This growth of evolution, this search for self has yielded many trees and many layers of new growth in me.

Before I was even a realization, my roots were the grounding formation I have come to stand on. They are of hearty, resilient, surviving fiber that I have discovered I can trust and depend on. Though there have been times of nurture and growth, knowing
and not knowing, winds to warp and weary, these elemental roots have remained. They are unshaken, dependable and stable, even in my distrust and disillusioned times. There have been times of disease, heart rot invading my soul, altering my growth and form, and yet the tree remained; perhaps twisted and scarred, but firmly grounded all the same. These times will inevitably revisit the tree. But I can now stand tall, strong and beautiful in my tree self. I know the security of a root system that will enable me to not only survive, but also to find a way to thrive and give back life and creative desires to those around me.

Through this cycle of life I have experienced, I have not been the gardener of my tree soul. I have allowed the brutal elements around me to affect me. My leaves have withered, my branches have born the weight of worries not my own, and my bark has grown thick with resistance to being hurt or harmed again.

I have discovered though that this fortress of bark, branches and leaves is no longer an adequate place of hiding. In fact, a place of hiding, protection and security is not necessarily what I desire. Rather, I am in the process of pruning away the dead, removing the disease and seeking again the miracle of re-birth and regeneration. While I was once that “little boy” running to the magic, the mystery, the knowledge and protection that I too sought from my tree, I am no longer running away or hiding. There has been an interminable period of time that I have merely survived by taking refuge in the tallest branches of my tree. I have withdrawn into myself, to seek refuge and protection. I have hidden for many reasons. I have hidden mainly to avoid the reality of what I have not been able to accomplish in my life. The failures that continue to haunt me, and the self-hatred I have developed for myself through the years of my life.
I have hidden in work, in family, teaching, coaching, cooking, and cleaning. It really did not matter where or how I hid, as long as I could stay concealed in the safety of some sort of branch that would provide protection and concealment for me. I wanted to not ever be vulnerable, not hear any negative comments about my art, myself, my tree. I wanted to be encompassed in the highest branches, safe from view and harm.

I have spent too much time avoiding the tree that I have always been. In the process, I nearly lost the tree altogether to my fears, disillusionments and discouragement. I am now ready to rediscover the solid roots that bind and keep me. I am ready to work on becoming the tree, not the acorn on the ground, forever dislocated and tossed around by any outside force. There is no finality in the conclusion of this project, rather inspiration, evolution and creation to come. There is freedom and hope in addition to the nagging fears of the unknown. I feel the delight of Ayaan Hirsi Ali when she received her pink card, yet the reticence that it might be too much to believe. “Like so many asylum seekers, I had to check in once a week to have my card stamped. September 1 was my first Tuesday in Lunteren, so that morning I went over to the police office at the asylum-seeker center. When I went to the desk, the policewoman looked at me and disappeared underneath the desk for a minute. She reemerged, cooing in English, ‘Oooh! Congratulations!’ and waving a pink card instead of my green one. I didn’t understand, but she shook my hand and said, ‘You can stay in Holland for the rest of your life. You are a recognized refugee, and now I will read you your rights.’ Sweating I thought, ‘Thank you Allah, thank you.’…The policewoman told me that there is no better status than the A status I received. As an A-status refugee, I would never again have to
check in to have my card stamped…’Do you have any more questions?’ the policewoman asked me, and I said, ‘Yes. Why are you doing this?’”

And I have asked myself the same question countless times. “Why are you doing this?” My time at the Creative Pulse has revitalized my dormant roots, and has given me the opportunity to discover what potential I still have in my life for growth, development, and the ability to give these gifts back to those around me. I have been so blessed to have been introduced to deep thinkers, eye opening authors, and instructors who pushed me to the breaking point more than once, and yet showered me with love and support through all the burning times. Inspiration, encouragement, and friends I will value for a lifetime have surrounded me. In the recounting of this experience, there has been so much change in my entire perception of life; I look at everything through “new eyes.” I no longer come down from the tree with reluctance. Instead of dread and fear for the future, because of this project, and due to my experiences in the Creative Pulse, I am now ready to go through that door and embrace my future as my very own tree.

“…I am halfway between two worlds, the known and the unknown. I feel transparent as the wind, as if my spirit is hovering in the sky, waiting to land. I am driving toward a future I can’t see, leaving behind a past that already feels distant. Nothing is clear --- and yet the trees are sharp against the sky…”

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“And so she comes to dream herself the tree,
The wind possessing her, weaving her young veins,
   Holding her to the sky and its quick blue,
Drowning the fever of her hands in the sunlight.
   She has no memory, nor fear, nor hope
Beyond the grass and shadows at her feet.”
-Hart Crane

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APPENDIX 1

Family Art Forms

Grandma Bacon’s Works
Great Grandma Cole’s Work
My Mother’s Art Forms
My Father’s Art Forms
Sources Consulted


Anon. [http://www.quoteland.com](http://www.quoteland.com)


Emerson, Ralph Waldo. “Familiar Quotations.” [www.bartleby.com/100/](http://www.bartleby.com/100/)


Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe.  www.millelacsojibwe.org/


Moore, Henry.  Quotation painted on the side of the Comma-Q Architecture building, 109 N. Rouse Avenue, Bozeman, Montana.


Olivier, Laurence.  Unknown source.


Fig. 21, Vision, 2008
Fig. 22, Eternal Hope, 2008