

## MY TREES

By Leila Bolster

### SILENCE OF THE TREES

The trees were crashing again as the saws and heavy machinery tore them down. He saw the bills paid and the forest being opened up to more sunlight. She felt the loss of those trees. They were her friends.

She had come to this land broken-hearted, sore stressed and broken. They lived in a small 21 foot trailer under the trees. When they arrived she was frightened of their looming presence. The utter silence in the trailer had not been heard since she was a small child in the jungles and vastnesses of southeast Asia. There were no appliances running with their background buzz, no TV blaring, no radio -- just the sounds of the forest. As the silence gathered around her she began to hear again. The trees had their own music, whispering in the breeze or wailing and swishing in the wind. In those first hot summer months when all their water had to be hauled either from the rest stop down the road or from the creeks they owned she would hear the drip --- drip --- drip of the dew dropping from their branches to the forest floor.

They cooked on a little butane stove she had traded her artistry for at a trade show. Sometimes they would cook on an open fire pit surrounded by big rocks. Every moment of every day was taken up with survival. They planted a small garden and using tent poles and some wire donated by a kind pastor planted a garden. They had found quite quickly that anything planted got eaten by the deer if it was not protected. There they grew some beans and some zucchini and greens. He put his potted roses on the hood of his truck to keep them out of harm's way. His gladiolas were covered with old socks -- a weird flower garden indeed. Those original glads are no more, fallen prey to the ravenous wild creatures of this land.

He brought his parrot, his 2 cockatiels and his budgies. They lived in an adjoining 21 foot trailer. Occasionally the air was burst with their wild calls and shrieks. Gradually the sounds of the forest sifted in -- The scree of the hawk flying over, the chatter of the squirrels, the strange waaaah of the baby fawn calling for its mother, the whirring of the hummingbirds so tame they would come right up to her face begging for sugar water.

"Don't put any curtains on our trailer windows," she said to him. "I want to see the trees first thing in the morning and last thing at night." She would wake in the morning and see them swaying or standing still like sentinels guarding the fastness of her forest land. When the moon was full she would see its light glistening through

Draft: Nov. 18, 2013

the branches as the bats soared through the sky catching mosquitoes and moths.

When the moon was full sometimes he would go out and walk around the yard relieving himself under the trees and walking around in the clear summer air with nothing on reveling in the privacy of this pristine space.

They put up a little bird feeder outside their window above their bed. Many wonderful and colorful birds came to feed there. She knew not their names, but she treasured their jewel-like colors. Their songs in her tall trees continued the healing in her heart as the joy came back little by little. The seeds missed by the birds would drop on the ground and soon sprouted a secondary crop of food for the birds.

She would go outside and whistle her praise to the rising sun.

“I Love you Lord, and I lift my voice to worship you,  
Oh my soul rejoice.

Give ear my King to what you hear  
Let it be a sweet sweet sound to your ear.”

The parrot would join in on one note whenever it came up. Then the wild birds would sing, and she would mimic their call with her whistle. It would echo across the valley and back again -- the valley of tall trees. One day she heard the Woooooah of a fawn so she mimicked it, and suddenly dashing out of the trees came its mother looking frantically all over for its baby.

The access to their home was through a long tunnel of tall trees overshadowing the gravel road that approached their home. At first her approach was tentative and fearful afraid a branch would fall on them or that she would get lost and not find their home. Now it is a welcome site to greet that tunnel of trees. It speaks to her of comfort and home and quiet and solitude -- a place to renew her spirit and commune with the Maker of the trees.

## SAFE AM I

In the winter the storms came and rocked the trailer. In a quavering voice she sang "Safe am I, Safe am I, in the hollow of His hand. Sheltered O'er, sheltered O'er in His love forevermore." until she believed it and fell asleep to awaken next day and find the trailer still standing with them in it. The trees swayed and branches crashed to the ground -- but none fell on them or their car and truck.

She remembered the times she had sung that song and the time when she learned the song. At five year of age she had just arrived with her parents and brother and sister in Bangkok, Thailand. They were staying at the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (formerly China Inland Mission) missionary home. She and her brother were out early playing in the beautiful park-like grounds there. There was a huge pond with large goldfish swimming in it. They were leaning over watching the fish darting and glimmering among the lilly pads, when she suddenly fell in. It was deep and as she was going down for the third time she heard her brother crying "She's swimming. She's swimming." She woke to find herself with a beautiful, dark-haired, soft-spoken lady who took the children to a tree in the garden and sat with them singing to them and talking kindly to them. There she taught them that song. After they had left Bangkok and moved to Chiangmai, she got a letter from that same lady - Miss Dixon, full of illustrations and learned her name. She was to become her first teacher at boarding school and would teach her to read sitting on her lap and giving her a hug each time she got a word right. In two weeks she learned to read.

Then there was the time under the jungle trees of Thailand north of Chiangmai, when she sang it again. She had returned from boarding school for their Christmas vacation with her sister to the Lisu tribal village called Ban Woh, where her parents and brother now lived. The Lahu people had built them a lovely bamboo house on stilts with four rooms in it -- a kitchen, a large living room area, a bedroom and a small wash room in the back. It had a large porch in the front where people gathered to get help for their needs, and sometimes they came into the living room area. The bedroom was shared with their parents. The small room at the very back was where they bathed or used the chamber pot when it was too dark to go outside.. The toilet was a small outhouse behind with two holes covered by toilet seats over a huge pit in the ground. Next to their house was a one-room guest house with a small porch out front, where she would often go to be quiet and read.

The children ran the jungle trails with the Lisu children sharing no language but the joy of being children. They had been down at the creek at the bottom of the hill that day drawing water with the Lisu tribal children, when they heard a wind rising in the orchid-festooned trees. The trees began to sway and crash in a disturbing way. They rushed up the hill running in their bare feet on the dusty paths. Just as they got to the top they heard a mighty crash in the jungle below. The howler monkeys whooped and hollered with their ululating cries echoing back and forth across the jungle valleys. Their mother bundled them into the house and fed them supper and then put them to bed.

The storm raged around them crashing and torrenting with rain. The thatched roof began to leak on them in their beds. Their father put them on a cot in the corner in the only dry spot and rushed around piling his books all around them rescuing the two things most precious to him -- his books and his children. She began to sing in her tiny voice the song her teacher had taught her.....

”Safe am I, Safe am I,  
in the hollow of His hand.  
Sheltered o’er,  
Sheltered o’er  
in His love forevermore.  
No ill can harm me.  
No foe alarm me  
For He keeps both day and night  
Safe am I  
Safe am I  
In the hollow of His hand.”

The next morning she learned first hand the truth of that song. The path where they had been playing moments before they heard the mighty crash was covered by a huge tree. The neighboring village had houses blown over and destroyed by the ferocity of the storm, but in their village the only house that was destroyed was one in which no one lived.

A few nights later they heard the coughing and roaring of a tiger. The next morning they went out to find that their were huge paw prints the size of dinner plates all around the village. Again their village was untouched -- not a pig nor a rooster was caught, but in the neighboring village a pig had been killed and eaten by the mighty cat.

She loved to call and sing in the jungle and hear her voice echoing back through the trees. Her father used to whistle loud and long when he was out on a trek to let her mother know he was safe and coming home. She would yodel back at him a long call of joy. That vacation she taught herself to whistle and listen to it echoing back to her through the treed mountain valleys. The monkeys would whoop back with their joyful cries echoing and re-echoing back.

When the Lisu men would go on a hunt they would shoot their guns in the air and the dogs would begin to bark wildly and off they would go. Their return was heralded with the howling and yapping joy of the dogs, and then they would burst back into the village through the trees with their guns and cross bows over their shoulders bearing their prey and a 3-yard banner of orchids pulled down from their sheltering trees. They had found out that missionary lady loved orchids. She taught their children school and treated their wounds and dispensed aspirin. They loved the missionary lady.

Draft: Nov. 18, 2013

As she mused on the memories, she thought of why she had been attracted to buy this hilltop property in the first place. The red earth of the red sandy clay reminded her of the red earth of the Lisu village and the treed hills and valleys reminded her of that jungle home.

Draft: Nov. 18, 2013

## GIFTS OF THE TREES

In the spring of the year she learned another gift of the trees. Bursting out in the trees around her were wild pink rhododendrons hanging like bunches of grapes from their ancient branches, and springing up all over their clearing were wild iris and foxgloves. Around the roots of the tall trees nestled wild yellow spotted violets and then the bell-like blossoms of the salal and wild blue berries. The bright pink blossoms of the wild currant and dandelions like medallions of gold spotted the barren areas. Then the bright blue fluffly blossoms of the grease bush brightened another corner of the clearing where they had placed their home.

Then in the fall under the trees one could find red and gold -- red lobster mushrooms and golden chanterells -- a gourmet feast waiting to be collected. What verdant loveliness and splendor!! What wealth of beauty! Alas, would the downing of the trees take them away as well?

He bursts in with a joyous tale of the logger, Jerry, who has brought his golden lab to work and of how he is working with a sprained ankle. She asks him if the dog will bother his chickens -- "No, he is gentle and uninterested." She asks if he is aware that it is unsafe to bring a dog to work especially when they are cutting down trees. He explains that he has already spoken to the young man about it. He is always interested in young people having been a teacher for many years. She is interested in her solitude when she is home, for when she is not home she must interact with people all day selling eggs to support the chickens.

Another day of logging has passed and as they are pulling out from their driveway the access is blocked by a large caterpillar. The loggers are looking out over the valley and talking and it takes awhile to notice them. The disinterested dog does, and he meanders slowly towards his master. Ahh -- they notice them and move the large vehicle to let them pass. She lowers her eyes as they pass the large load of logs laying beside the road.

Off to the swimming pool they go for their constitutional. Two or three times a week they travel for an hour to the next city to exercise in the pool. He swims laps in large joyous leaps through the water like a dolphin. She bobs along with a swim noodle running in the water and swinging her arms through the water in imitation of swimming to strengthen the muscles and sinews damaged by her many accidents: a broken arm, compound fractures in her back, a broken hip with a pin in it, a broken ankle with a pin in it. For her the joy of being able to do in the water what cannot be done on land cannot be described. Back and forth across the width of the pool she paddles with her arms and runs with her legs. She watches him as she paddles with his muscles rippling on his back and arms slicing through the water like marine mammal. In one year of doing this she has progressed from hardly being able to walk and climb stairs to walking with a smooth gait and losing 15 lbs. She is able to bound up and down the stairs and empty the car and do her work with more ease and strength. After about a half an hour of this they both get out and

Draft: Nov. 18, 2013

go to the hot tub to massage the sore places and relax. Her swimsuit is too big she notices as the jets from the hot tub inflate her suit to epic proportions. Fortunately no one else is in their with them as they giggle over this.

The next time they swim they get there too late for the use of her swim noodle. It is a family swim. Another lady is there and they occupy the place closest to the rope at the deep end. He starts his joyous bound through the water splashing all around him with the butterfly stroke. They watch him as they paddle back and forth. Suddenly she notices she is doing the dog paddle without the use of her noodle. Then she tries to do the breast stroke and realizes that after 14 years from her accident she has remembered how to swim again. It has taken this long to regain her confidence in the water. This is the day of miracles and it is a good one. Each day has its treasures buried in the sorrows. On this day it is the realization that something she thought was lost was there all along waiting for the strength to be used again.

The accident took so much from her: The ability to write music and play it on the piano, the ability to swim, the ability to balance a check book and add up figures. Each month she struggles to pay the bills and is an absolute cranky bitch until it is over. Maybe just as she has learned to walk again and swim again, she can relearn all of these things as well.

The next day they go to church -- a friendly church with good music. They sing and praise and take the communion after being reminded to get things right first with other people. She thinks about forgiving and letting go all grudges as she takes the elements to her lips. The man beside her forgives her much --- her mood changes, her lapses in memory, the misunderstandings of daily life with another. She forgives him the same. They click their glasses and eat the bread and drink the cup. The sermon is an object lesson as the pastor takes a pumpkin describing the sin in our lives being removed by Christ as he scoops out the seeds and pulp, and then he puts a candle inside and turns it around and there carved on the side is the word JESUS, and the light shines through those words to remind us to let the light of Christ shine through our lives to those around us.

They drive immediately home and as they come up through the trees to the cleared spots he points out how the light is being let into the forest by the removal of the big trees. There is a golden light shining through the leaves that has not been there before.. The golden light somehow comforts her sorrow at the loss of the trees, for the little trees still remain and the light is breaking through. He talks of planting blueberries and having more light to his greenhouses for food to grow.

Putting her hands in the dirt has a very wonderful affect. She has a friend, Bryan, who goes to other countries to teach them how to grow plants that will feed them and nurture the soil. He says that his prayers are on his knees planting trees. He plants the moringa trees in tropical countries for they provide food in every part of them and fertilize the soil at their roots for shade-loving plants to grow. His students are taught how to use the trees for food. The excess feeds their livestock.



Draft: Nov. 18, 2013

He sees families go from malnutrition to health eating these leaves, going from poverty to living with the food they can sell. In the evening he teaches adults and children who cannot afford an education so that they can graduate from high school. Little by little his “prayers of planting” result in changes in their standard of living. Where there was despair there is hope. Where there was hunger and malnutrition there is strength. As minds open and discover the world around them there is an avid desire to learn more.

“I wonder”, she thinks “What kind of crops I can grow as I plant trees on my knees.”

## THE WITNESS OF THE TREES

Around the property when they first settled there were many huge tree stumps -- some of redwood -- and a large steel cable coiled close to the bank of their driveway. A neighbor told them that where their manufactured home was placed used to be a log landing and the driveway was where the logging trucks would go to have the logs rolled onto them. At one time there was a clear view from the top of their hill to the whole of Cape Ferrelo and the ocean around it. The former owners had bought the property with that in mind. However, since their purchase, the trees had grown up blocking the view and the high winds.

When out thrift shopping she had rescued a large stainless steel pole with hooks on it -- later finding out it was for hauling around bags of saline solution drip if you were an invalid. She saw it as a hook for hanging her plants or bird feeders. She jammed it in a stump and hung up her bird feeder -- that was before the cats arrived.

When they first arrived on their hill a trio of orange cats came out of the trees and inspected them carefully. They did not allow any approach -- just checked them out and left. They never saw them again excepting in the evidence later in marmalade kittens that they were still around. However, they did not bother the couple and never harmed the birds that visited their seed feeders and hummingbird feeders.

Petey was a stinky white papered persian cat with an impeccable pedigree and a strange deep yowl belonging to her husband. "Maoww" was his main means of communication. He sprayed frequently and often and everywhere. His ability to procreate was somewhat hampered by the length of his fur. He had a wondrous ruff of fur somewhat like a lion's mane around his head and then a fluffy ball all over the rest of him. This fur had a tendency to mat in the winter months requiring frequent brushing and trimming. When they were living in their apartment prior to moving down to be close to her daughter, he had occupied a cage in their garage along with the good-natured female long-haired tortoiseshell cat Turtle chosen to be Petey's mate.

Much to the consternation of their upstairs neighbor his spray would waft up her stairs through the garage walls. After a vociferous complaint from her, Petey and Turtle and their bucket of elite cat food were bundled off to his sister's house for care until they could find a more permanent and suitable home. After then had been living in their wilderness solitude for about 3 months, the sister began to send frantic messages that she could not cope with the subsequent batch of kittens and would he please come get them. So after 3 blissful catless months, they went up for a medical appointment and stopped by to pick up the cats. Petey had been shaved and thus had been able to father some kittens. By the time they got there -- all the best kittens had been given away. All that were left were 3 white ones and a black one. So where there had been no cats she was expected to provide homes for 6.

Draft: Nov. 18, 2013

She made it plain that after driving in the car with stinky cat -- he was not going to occupy their home. There also was not room in a 21-foot trailer for 3 more kittens and their momma. A stop was made on the way home to drop off one white one to Jimmy, who wanted a persian white cat. Next day they took a black and a white one down to the pet store figuring if folk paid for them they would give them a good home.. One white kitten and the two adults were left.

She named the white kitten "Whiter Than Snow" to remind them that they had been forgiven and were whiter than snow. This was later shortened to "Snow". It was an adequate name for the little white ball of fur with blue eyes. They tried letting the three roam the property and keeping the Snow inside the trailer, but Petey's habit of spraying on the door and hoarse mwaaing to get in, did not make for pleasant living conditions in an already cramped trailer. The kitten climbed the curtains and yowled to be let out. Turtle was a pleasant unneutered cat who was perfectly happy to hunt outdoors, be fed and petted whenever someone wanted to do this for her and produce prodigious batches of kittens once or twice a year. This also did not help with the healing of her already shattered nerves. So he built a cage with wire donated by friends and built a shelter with a moving box rescued from the local land clearing office. There the cats lived until Petey got too old to stay outside and was moved in next to the parrots in the storage trailer.

## TREES AND PROPERTY LINES

The logger calls "There will be a surveyor up there. One of the neighbors has a question about where the trees are being cut and his property."

"Give our neighbor's property lines a wide berth." She says. "I do not want any trouble with my neighbors. We need each other and caring about each other is not worth cutting trees that are not ours." He agrees and assures her this will not happen.

The surveyor comes and it appears that 2 trees have been cut on their neighbor's property. He calls the neighbor to tell him and offer to make it right -- the neighbor hangs up on him and trouble has begun.

What part of "Keep a wide berth around the neighbor's property." do they not understand?" She cries to her husband. Now there is not just the crash and buzzing of the cutting trees, there is trouble with the neighbor. She calls and lets the loggers know that this is not cool. Next day first thing the logger arrives at their door and assures her husband that all will be well and cared for. Yet none of this would have been necessary had there been proper respect and care of those borders.

"Good fences make for good neighbors." is such a true saying. When there are clear boundaries in relationships there is peace. Obviously the loggers -- hirelings of the construction company -- had not been instructed by their boss on where our property ended and the neighbor's began.

She remembers past history with this neighbor's renters, who had cut their trees and sold them for firewood, dumped garbage in the canyon and borrowed their chainsaw without asking returning it broken with a dull blade. Yet this neighbor was going to go to court over 4 trees. Their response had been to forgive the renters for they had little children living there, and the laughter and antics of the children brought them much joy. In times of trouble the renters had been helpful and kind. Perhaps a letter reminding their landlord of all of this might smooth the troubled waters.

Another conversation with the loggers results in the realization that they are wanting them to take the fall. They tell her that the logger who kept on cutting trees when the surveyor was there to do the negotiating. She tells the owner of the business, "Why are you asking the dulllest pencil in the box to do the negotiating? You are the contractors with the license to do business, don't you know how to read a map? You know your employee is not that sharp, and you promised us that you would keep a wide berth around the neighbor's property lines. Why were you not out there supervising your logger to make sure he did just that? I asked you to make sure that there was no trouble with the

neighbors like the last time you did business, but you have caused us trouble and stress. Is the loss of your good name worth all this profit? You have destroyed my relationship with two of my neighbors with this lack of checking boundaries thoroughly.” The owner of the business agrees to do the talking with the neighbor and smooth over troubled waters. She is not reassured.

Again another few lessons are learned.

1. Be careful to whom you say “yes”.
2. No money in all the world can replace the good will of your neighbors.
3. It is easy for someone who wants to get your business to say whatever they think you want to hear, but in the end it is up to you to make sure that they keep their word.
4. Your property is only yours if you are able to defend it.

They are here with their big trucks again, churning up the mud in the driveway and picking up the logs that they have cut down. Logging has ceased and now for the hauling of the harvest to market. The constant noise of the cats and trucks disturbs her peace again. She has already cried as she heard the trees fall, but nothing can change what has been done. What will the outcome be? There has been no check in the mail only receipts for logs received. She wonders. She prays like King David did laying it out on the altar before God. Only God can change the mind of a king, how much easier to change the mind of a vengeful neighbor.

## **ONE DAY AT A TIME -- COPING WITH THE LOSS OF THE TREES**

Now to go on is her motto to cope each day. Staying in a peaceful frame of mind is so important to daily health and sanity - each day doing the mundane tasks that fill the day with order and creatively finding ways to get rid of the excess stuff in her home. It is a big task but it cannot be accomplished by putting it off or being ignored. She has determined that each day she will rid her home of a box or do something towards eliminating things that have not been used in over a year.

Yesterday she looked up prices on a canvas folding picnic table with 4 chairs with carrying case. She has left it in the box unopened for over a year. She got 2 of them on barter figuring to use them to put up at the market and sell eggs, but then found that sitting that long gave too much pain for the return on her investment. The unopened one still left in a box sits in her family room like a cardboard pillar. The price on ebay is \$139.95 for a similar set. The price has gone up since she bought it.

She has decided that what she cannot sell she will give away, and what she cannot give away she will throw away. Each day in the past week she has worked towards that goal. Inch by inch everything is a cinch, so little by little the exodus is going on. One day she takes two bags of books and videos and donates them at the library for a \$20 receipt for charitable donations on her taxes. Another day she sends a box of books to the bookstore to sell them for whatever they will give her. She is noticing that as she clears space in her home her mind is working more clearly on other things.

The sun is shining and she turns to him, "Let's go out and enjoy the sun before the rains come. Time enough to do internet research and indoor tasks when there is no sun outside." It is a lovely and warm day as together they move the chicken tractor and he digs up a row of already fertilized ground, plowed, debugged by the chickens. They plant the winter crop of baby bak choy and kale plants raised in her little porch greenhouse.

She transplants the baby plants to larger pots and gets her mesclun lettuce plants out of the flats and into a pot with deeper soil. Soon it will be ready to harvest and enjoy with winter salads. She sorts out all the pots. She clears the clutter of the summer off of their porch realizing that when the winter comes with the rains, that will be her outdoor work area. Getting plants from pots into the soil is another job to increase the curb appeal of their home.

There is a reward for all of this outdoor time as he joyously brings in a 10" butternut squash. It is smooth and beautiful and huge. There are more out there hidden in the squash vines waiting for our discovery and harvest. She finds bunches of baby bak choy and includes them in a lunch of stir-fried local vegetables. Self sufficiency is so satisfying.

After dark, her energy to create change and order continues. There are the tasks preparing for a difficult winter predicted ahead. She clears a shelf and sorts her seeds for the greenhouse. She is seed-saving consciously this year. Whether she stays or goes, those precious seeds will go with her. As they watch a movie on the internet she sorts and bags seeds for the next year's planting. Saving seeds of favorite vegetables is an important task with this rising tide of biogenetic manipulation of our seeds and plants. Delicata, zuchetta, radish, broccoletta, red kale, scarlet runner beans, pole beans and horehound are carefully separated from their seed pods and stored in dated marked tiny zip loc bags, then sealed in jars. A shelf of clutter is cleared and the seeds are ready to use.

As she clears up the shelf she discovers her sprouting seed. She starts sprouts inside in jars with grated lids for more winter greens -- pea sprouts and sunflower sprouts. Their delicious crunch is a great addition to their fall and winter diet. Some will be planted in flat trays outside to green and grow bigger. Next she sees the salad sprouts of different kinds and thinks how good that will be this winter when the rains will prevent outdoor harvesting. With all four shelves clear and clean order is restored to her dining room window. She thinks when she gets her Amazon bookstore shelves cleared, there will be room there for this grow shelf. As each area is cleared of clutter her heart is lightened and her mind is clearer seeing that out of small seeds and actions big and profitable things can grow.