

**ODE FOR A BIG LEAF MAPLE**  
**by**  
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**The Call to Attention:**

Breath  
Deep  
This tree that stands before you has shared its gentle breath,  
Within your lungs, its very essence...  
Oxygen  
Breath  
Deep

**The Call to Observation:**

Now look up,  
At this canopy of one,  
To its lopsided crown,  
This survivor of weather, wind, years and trim  
struggles against fungi and rot.  
Big Maple has seen better days,  
growing from samara to seedling to sapling to tree.  
It is aware that it has lost some but, not all of itself.

Travel along its remaining branches  
to its twigs, leaves, and shoots  
This towering nature highrise  
houses yet a still thriving community  
of avian, mammalian and insect residents.  
Who hears the snaps and crackle call of this old master  
Signalling to all creatures to come  
And enjoy what remains?

Follow down its ridged and cracked trunk  
Holder of sap, cambium and phloem...  
Lean your ear into listen for the sap song gurgle?

Wonder at the story hidden in its rings  
That tells of times of plenty of nutrient and food  
of scarcity and thirst.

Reach out  
Touch its bark  
thick and textured,  
a protective layer  
weathered and worn  
with a patina of mosses, lichens, and other growths  
that cling to its surface.

See the intrusions into its skin  
Electric wire holding socket  
Wrapped with its skin  
Until it is part of the tree.

Continue observing Big Maple  
until trunk becomes roots  
and intersects with earth.  
Big trunk fingers extend down  
thinning and branching  
until a matted network of root  
holds 'big' in place and communication network created.

This hidden network lays under  
shed leaves, winged seeds, and broken pieces of tree detritus  
that feed the ground below;  
then grass, gravel and soil...  
going deep, reaching far below park lot and buildings.

Now reach down  
Seek a piece of this tree  
Hold it in your hand

Breath  
Deep

This tree that stands before you has shared its gentle life,  
Within your hand its essence...

Breath

Deep

### **The Call to Consideration:**

Time now to stop and contemplate,  
how have I known this tree?

The spirit of this *Acer macrophyllum* has  
borne witness with grace and beauty  
to the passing of time  
to the resilience of the natural world  
and the interference of man.

It has lived through a time of old-growth trees,  
Big Leaf Maple ancestral forests  
along all the shores of False Narrows...

It has lived through a time when the Snuneymuxw people fished, hunted, and  
gathered plants for food and medicine...  
when coastline would have been lined with kelp beds, and sea otters and seals...  
and clams and salmon were easily harvested...  
when meadows camas was harvested  
and maples, too, were used for food and tools,  
its flowers were eaten  
its flesh became spears, and bowls...

It has lived through the arrival of European settlers  
and the transformation of the forest as fields and orchards were established...  
when the harvest of trees meant survival  
and the naming of communities called 'The Maples'.

Indeed, this maple is Gabriolan history...

As it sits in the middle of the parking lot straddled by two South Road entrances...  
A character defining the element of this very site.

It has lived through the time of the Shaws, the Nairns, the Kemps  
as they gave over properties for community institutions.

It lived through the time of the first school building, its life as a Church and  
eventual demolition...

It lived through a time of great fire as Community Hall number one burnt to the  
ground.

And on, through 67 Salmon Barbeques...  
it has lived until now...

So, here we are near the end,  
So ask yourself again...  
how have I known this tree?

As shade giver, or playground,  
As a backdrop for a stage,  
a stop for sweet lovers to escape from the dance to steal a kiss,  
did you smoke under its branches, or pull out a joint..

Or simply just enjoyed it for being its self?

**The Call to Honour:**

And now, let's honour Big Maple...  
with your hand on your heart  
recognize the dignity of this tree  
know that greatest gift in this world is growing old.  
and that this tree has shared that gift with us,  
has lived with us,  
and celebrated with us,  
and comforted us,  
and kept us connected to Mother Earth  
for its entire life.

...and repeat after me, thank you.

