

PINE FOREST

We walk hand in hand
The boy and I
On the soft sandy horse trail
The early morning mist
Now having moved slowly to reveal the tall pine trees
Greeting us in the distance with their perfume
A congregation of upright silent worshippers
The looming density of wooded trunks
Reflecting the hundred year old age of this forest.

Question after question pours out without interruption
From the little boy
Such an inquisitive mind
And I patiently answer as I remember my father's impatience
With my own questions as a child
The little boy's hand grasps mine
Unconscious as to how precious these moments are for me.
I see my childhood and his as a seamless continuum
And time contracts and makes me sad.

In the clearing
Surrounded by these huge pines
Like the Burgher's of Calais
So self-righteous
Yet so dignified
On their pondering silence.
In this clearing we sit in silence on tree stumps
And I ask him to be silent and listen to the forest
And tell me what he hears.

I want so badly to teach him to listen to the silence
This almost five year old boy
To hear the secrets of the pine forest
But I hear only his ongoing questions.
As we look for the pine cones, the sapling trees close by
He runs to measure his lanky height against theirs.
We see the older thicker ones and compare them to his father then to his grandfathers'
In age and thickness.

The wind blows gently through the pines
The blue sky punctuated by the soft white puffs of clouds-a perfect Shabbat morning.
I tell him that one day he will hold his own grandson in his hand and walk with him to a

similar forest of trees to teach him the secret of the trees, their being born, growing up, ageing and breaking off to lie in the ground.

He listens urgently. He is an intense spirit probing the world to make sense of it as I had done as a youngster.

I look around at the silence of the forest and just this moment I feel the joy of being so alive and being with this child.

I cannot describe how much comfort this little boy has brought to my life as well as hope.

More than anyone he has brought me to a kind of acceptance of my own mortality and a serenity in just knowing he will live on after me and I will forever be his Dada and be in his heart like my own Dada. And that is good enough! After all those years of struggle in fear and dread, in the dark nights of anticipation, as if my life accelerated to its conclusion quicker than others, in that horror I have emerged to this delightful being who comforts me by his mere existence in my life.

Like this forest he has taught me serenity is the very silence- the silence of acceptance of my mortal body as part of nature, in its rhythm of life growth decay and death.

כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַיַּעַר

“for man is like the tree of the forest”

Has new meaning for me today

As with all life and with trees

We are powerless to step outside the facts and the knowledge of what must come

What must happen

Powerless to step much beyond our genetic predilections for health disease and decline.

Despite the sacred texts that speak of eternal life

The cemeteries known and the “land of the living”

Today I feel only the divine immanence of nature

Of nature as immortal and eternal compared with our creatureliness and ever so brief sojourn in this world.

My Dada used to hug mien his green cardigan at the entrance to his Wembley home welcoming me with a spoonful of castor oil! But what lies buried in my heart was his love. My memories of him, his smell, his love, his presence are embedded in my heart- and today I try to be as present as I can to this little boy-who, one day, will hold his grandson closed to him while remembering me.

We walk back along the sandy horse trail and I am unsure whether he will even remember this day-Pine Forest- but I tell him, it was, for me, the best part of my weekend.