

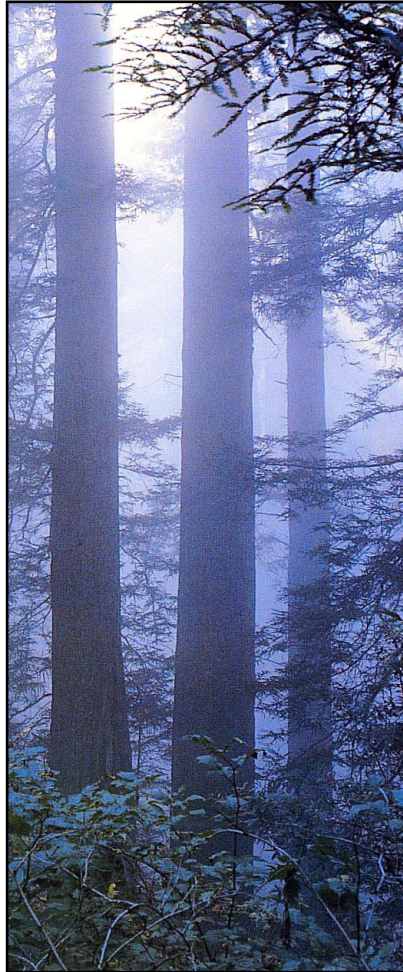
Standing

THE TREE WAS TENACIOUS, TO SAY THE LEAST. Try as we might, combining brute strength with the power of chain saws, it simply would not cooperate.

Two storms—a premature snowstorm in the autumn and a windstorm in the spring—succeeded in toppling the largest oak tree standing between the house and the pond. To be precise, it was really two trees, since these oaks, left unattended, often divide at the base into two or more trees. A heavy snowfall in October, while there were still leaves on the trees to collect the weight, took one of the trees toward the pond. Then the spring windstorm finished the job, bringing the other half down—this time toward the house.

The top of the second tree got hung up on a branch of another, still-standing tree, which prevented it from dropping all the way to the ground. With the base still firmly attached, this presented a challenge. How do we safely drop the tree the rest of the way down? The answer was to follow normal procedure for such a circumstance: We began by sectioning it at the base, cutting up from the underside so that as the weight of the trunk pulled down, the cut would open up, thus preventing the saw blade from being caught. The plan was to continue this process up the trunk, until it had been reduced to about half its length. Then we would pull the remainder of the tree back toward the pond, freeing it from the tree in which its branches lay. Right.

We laid on the ropes, pulled, yanked, grunted and sweat. We attached the rope to the tractor and pulled. We sectioned more of the trunk away—until that end was literally swinging free of the ground. We pulled, we strained, but the tree refused to come down. We attached three ropes to different branches, pulled from countless directions. Still no go. We trimmed away more secondary branches, pulled from different directions until...at long last the rest of the tree reluctantly released its grip and toppled down to the ground.



It was as if the tree desperately wanted to remain in the heights with its brethren. Try as we might, we men of the soil could not get it to let go of its lofty union. Though we had reduced it to half its former self, we could not force it to come down to our level.



**For thus says the high and exalted One
Who lives forever, whose name is Holy,
“I dwell on a high and holy place,
And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit
In order to revive the spirit of the lowly
And to revive the heart of the contrite.”**

Isaiah 57:15

We can sometimes feel as if we are in a tug of war between the forces of heaven and the battalions of earth. Like the tree, our feet are planted in the soil, but our heads—our spirit and spiritual purpose—are reaching toward the brilliance of God in the clouds. Our spirit aches to dwell with His.

Meanwhile the soldiers of the soil hack away at us, struggling to bring us down to their level, trying to pull us out of the light of righteousness. And we hold on, tenaciously refusing to join them.

Be not far from me, for trouble is near;
For there is none to help.
Many bulls have surrounded me;
Strong *bulls* of Bashan have encircled me.
They open wide their mouth at me,
As a ravening and a roaring lion.

Psalms 22:11-13

But sometimes, try as we might, they win. Sometimes, because they are as tenacious as we, the men of the soil finally succeed in bringing us down to their level.

I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It is melted within me.

My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
And You lay me in the dust of death.

Psalms 22:14-15

That tree will never rise again, but the heights are still available to us. The light of heaven still beckons, showing us the way.

To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
Make me know Your ways, O Lord;
Teach me Your paths.
Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You are the God of my salvation;
For You I wait all the day.

Psalms 25:1,4-5