

Adapt to Change

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September, 2010

Adapt to Change. Those words comprise a sign hidden among the trees in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. They're part of an outdoor nature-inspired art exhibit intended to encourage people to explore the natural world.

It's a commonplace that the only thing you can count on in this life is change, and nothing reminds me more strikingly of this than the change of the seasons. Already it's autumn and time to say goodbye to the richness of summer. I tend to think and plan in terms of the garden—dig the potatoes and dahlias, plant more daffodil and tulip bulbs for spring, move the shrubs to a better location before the rains come. I don't need a change in the light or the drifting leaves to remind me autumn has arrived. The ending of summer brings a feeling of change in the rhythm of things. It's time to put away the frivolity of summer play, plan ahead, get organized, buy new pencils.

Adapt to change. But with change comes wistfulness, a sadness at the disappearance of what used to be. Or perhaps it's a longing to hold on to the rambunctious color and gaiety of summer, to burn into memory the sights and sounds—the hum of the bees in the thicket, the swooning swoosh of the doves at the feeder, the raucous screech of the ravens against a brilliant blue sky. I take in yet another crimson sunset over the ocean and in my mind's computer, hit "Save as." Save as "Amazement."

I got a letter from a friend in Michigan who enclosed a photograph of a massive 150-year old oak tree near her century-old farmhouse. The tree was silhouetted against a pale Michigan sky, and a field of green climbed the hillside behind it. What drew my eye, however, was red. Red balloons, three of them tied to a red ribbon wound round the gigantic girth of the trunk. The ribbon held up a white sign upon which five words were printed in blood red ink: "Oak Tree—We Love You." Upon learning the tree was to be taken down in the name of "progress" to make room for a turning lane and a newly paved road to replace their gravel country road, she felt the need to honor the tree.

Adapt to change. I try to remember this. Some of my own trees came down yesterday. We knew they had to, knew their potential danger in storms, knew they were leaning toward the house, knew it was the right thing to do, still....

I busied myself in the house because I couldn't bear to watch. But it was the sounds that got me. From over 100 feet up, the tree cowboys brought the first of them down, first her limbs and branches where the jays and thrushes had perched above their world and then her massive trunk, section-by-section, chunk-by-chunk. She fell to the earth with a thunderous thud, and the earth seemed to groan in its travail. "Heads up" the cowboys

shouted, and more thuds. At the end of the day, chaos reigned. Heaps of branches and limbs, splintered trunks, thick slabs of wood the size of end tables lay all around. These stately sentinels, two Hemlocks and a Douglas fir, guarded our front for as long as we've lived here and for generations before.

The day after, I saw a tiny finch land on the debris as if to wonder what happened to her home. I gathered a few tiny cones of the thousands that littered the ground and put them in a small dish on my desk to remind me of their mothers.

Once the view of the forest and creek is opened up, I'll likely exclaim how lovely it is and adapt to the change. The memory and loss of what used to be will probably fade. Still...