

TREES 'N' TRAITS: *Cedars - "Resilience"*

Neil Baldwin

Have you ever spent time in the company of trees and noticed good feelings arising? Of course you have, but did you wonder why? It could be physiological. The Japanese have long known the benefits of "forest bathing," thanks to the medicinal aerosols that accompany all that oxygen the trees put out. But it might also be psychological.

Similar to the idea of power animals, it's not unreasonable to think that trees can offer us energy, either by the presence of species which echo our traits, or by those which stretch beyond them. In this first of a ten-part series, consider the Cedar and how much of you is reflected in this tree's characteristics.

Cedar is dense and mysterious. Its branches are not long but they are many; they can make it difficult to penetrate or even see from where branches originate. A stand of cedar can appear to be a twisted

and puzzling sight. Compact and utilitarian, cedar has the same basic appearance regardless of season. While not a strong wood, it nevertheless resists decay and is resilient to environmental stresses.

Cedar is a wise survivor, able to grow in harsh conditions, shallow soils or with scant nutrients. This often results in stunted development but it does keep growing, even though it may not be obvious to look at. In fact, cedars often continue maturing to very old age quietly accumulating many years of experience and exposure to the world around them as they do.

If you have ever been called an "old soul" you may be a cedar; likewise if someone has said you have a tendency to be closed or keep your cards close to your chest. You may also identify with cedar if you have its tendency toward resilience, able to deal with adverse conditions yet keep on growing, even if others cannot

see that progress. In winter, cedar boughs get flattened by snow load but they almost always bounce back. Does that sound like you?

If you are a cedar and find yourself in need of a boost, or if you are not a cedar but admire some of its qualities, find yourself a place where these trees can have your back. You won't need to look far in Grey-Bruce, particularly on the peninsula. A favoured area for me is along the Bruce Trail on the Lion's Head promontory, especially in the northeast extent, which offers panoramic lookouts to Georgian Bay. Or for something easily accessed, try the Bruce Trail heading northward along the escarpment base from Owen Sound's Centennial Tower. Either option offers wise cedars ready to support your introspection and growth. Next month: Larches. ☙

Literacy on its Feet

Kimm Culkin

South Grey Bruce Youth Literacy Council's new drama workshops are in the final planning stages, and the youth of the South Grey Bruce area couldn't be in better hands. Literacy on its Feet, a project funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, provides an arena for those students who need help to build literacy skills, but aren't suited to a one-on-one tutoring approach, which remains the SGBYLC's core program. Over six weeks, participants learn improv games and scripting skills, resulting in a five-minute presentation piece in the final session.

Youth Literacy co-ordinator Kimm Culkin announced the appointment of Jenny Parsons as field co-ordinator for the program earlier this month: "Jenny is a respected local performing and visual artist, who has a commitment to literacy and is certified with the Ontario College of Teachers," says Kimm. "Her professional performing experience is impressive. She co-wrote and performed in six original revues at Toronto's Second City, an in-

ternationally respected improv theatre. She has both TV and film credits as well, including a feature-length film created with partner Steve Morel. Jenny has her Ontario Teachers' certification and is also a writer and painter. And she knows this community."

Jenny will be supported by screened, trained and experienced adult and teen volunteers. "Participants will see other benefits, too," says Kimm. "Drama, and improv in particular, provides excellent training in communication, presentation, conflict resolution and group collaboration skills. You learn to be flexible and resilient, to see your way past an immediate failure and to cut other people a little slack, too. We hope to have three different groups running by the official program start in the first week of May."

The SGB Youth Literacy Council has earned an enviable reputation over its 20+ history for its free, confidential, one-on-one tutoring program, still the organization's core program, which has served hundreds



of learners over the years. Kimm points out, "This is another way we can support school-aged students and their families in strengthening literacy skills. We need a variety of approaches. School classes work for many; one-on-one works for others; this is another route." Kimm added that she hoped this would provide a starting point for other Literacy on its Feet streams, including sports, art, music, life skills and literacy.

If you're interested in getting help for your school-aged child or taking part as a volunteer, contact Kimm at the South Grey Bruce Youth Literacy Council at (519) 364-0008 or info@sgbyouthliteracy.org. ☙