

Reaching Out

(Written in response to conversations with members of the Teenage and Young Adult Cancer Professional Education Group)

When saplings wake to snow
in the midst of spring, sudden winter
doesn't stop the tug of growth.

Time slows down as clouds whoosh past,
and longing spins new rings
around their teenage hearts.

Emotions ripen many different fruits;
from laughter's lovely juice to anxious pips,
from angry bitterness to thickened skin.

Each sapling leans against your healing tree
-
your web of leaves, from doctors to social
workers,
radiographers to dieticians, therapists to
nurses.

Your wisdom weaves from branch-to-
branch,
and passes nutrients from root-to-root.
Your sap is always on the move -

a thousand wing-beats at your doors,
a rush of clinics, ward-rounds, calls,
decisions, hand-holds and reports.

Some truths aren't written on a chart.
You start by asking what your patients need
and listen closely to the silent earth

beneath the surface of their words.
Saplings blossom when their buds are
heard.
A jigsaw-puzzle pieced by leaves.

Your strength supports, connects, absorbs -
and breaking news can break both ways -
its blooms can burst with joy or grief.

Perhaps a tightness in your chest,
that curls its feelers into thoughts
so journeys cling to you a little more.

This year, the world has learned
to shape our friendships from afar
and bond with loved ones when it's hard.

Maybe this will help us all to grasp
how saplings feel when clouds slow down,
and melt the fear of frost by reaching out.

This year, you've worked the extra shift of
love,
to fill the gaps that visitors can't touch,
extending extra branches from within.

More than anyone, you know that winter
prints its footsteps in the snow. It's warming
work,
but some things take some time to thaw.

So listen to the wildlife in your chest.
Let fellow branches twine with yours,
and feel the wind beneath your leaves.

Reflective jacket on - a cycle home,
a run with friends, a woodland walk.
The music loud, the windows down.

And we who pass beside your trees
must stop to press our palms against your
bark,
to try to understand, not hurry past.

In saplings' gratitude, your work lives on:
the places where your branches touched
begin a lifelong ripple through a core of
rings.