



Divining: A Memoir in Trees

Maureen Dunphy

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Maureen Dunphy's memoir-in-essays, *Divining*, conveys a lifelong love of trees and the feelings of sanctuary that they provide.

Throughout Dunphy's lifetime, trees have inspired her, comforted her, and connected her to the natural world. In each personal and reminiscent narrative, Dunphy concentrates on a specific tree species and chronicles her reflections and experiences as they relate to that tree.

Most of the essays are set in Michigan, where Dunphy grew up and still resides; others take place in Ontario, Colorado, and North Carolina. "The Flowering of 2020: The Silver Maple" is a melancholic, reassuring essay about COVID-19 and the living world's survival: "Silver maples will continue to flower ... on planet Earth ... with or without the presence of humans, with or without you and me." In "The Boundary Oak: The White Oak," Dunphy shares childhood memories of a beloved centuries-old oak, which inspires a "cascade of questions" about the "generations of human families" that may have gazed upon its widening branches.

The collection is driven by inquisitiveness and awe and rounds out with appendices and suggestions for further reading. Dunphy is a searcher, always questioning the "root" foundation of the trees that guide, teach, and challenge her. She looks to science and history to enhance her knowledge. She discovers that beech trees can be heard murmuring at night and that trees possess intelligence and can communicate with other trees. Additionally, she laments the blight of four billion American chestnut trees by a fungus from Japan in 1904.

Engaging, intimate, and expansive, the essays of *Divining* envision a kindred spiritedness between Dunphy and members of the "Standing Nation." Whether discussing the Eastern Redcedar, Sweetgum, Ginkgo, or American Sycamore (the tree she loves the best), Dunphy conveys that cultivating relationships with trees "is one of the things that makes us truly human."

AMY O'LOUGHLIN (January / February 2023)

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