

A Global Conversation-The Foundation-It's All About Community  
November -- 2009

## When Leaves Fall, We Still Remember

CLT

When leaves fall from the towering oaks that surround our lives, we remember their beauty and how they matured in front of our eyes and behind our backs. One day, there were no leaves; and, the next day, we saw the sprouting of soft green emerging from the harshness of the stark limbs we had just observed the day before. It was cool. Life was unfolding in front of us and we could hardly wait for the days and nights to continue and for the leaves to cluster, providing shade and beauty for all who pass by. Trees filled with the green leaves of summer and the red, orange and gold leaves of autumn look as if they will last forever, watching over us and giving us reason to believe in ourselves and others. And then, while we are sleeping and without consultation, the north winds gather and, with swiftness, they unsettle all that we thought and wished would last forever. The leaves fall to the ground. The once foliage full trees stand barren. But, our memories of all we enjoyed -- of trees ripe with leaves and colors beyond our imagination -- still remain.

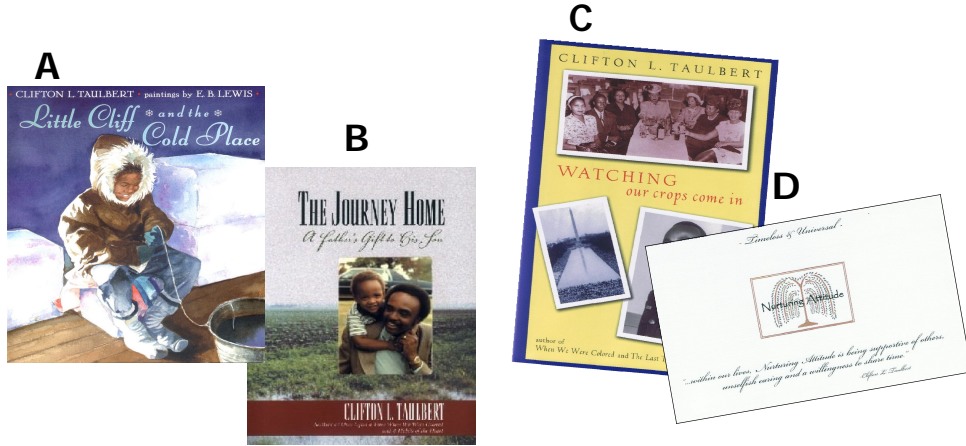
And so it was for me during the month of October. The leaves fell. Two people I knew and loved -- people who were to me a cluster of leaves I wished to last forever -- fell prey to the swiftness of the north wind. There was nothing I could do to hold them here with me. Though both lives had provided shade and beauty beyond ninety years, I wanted their natural gifts to keep on giving. Over the years, their lives had been filled with many memorable moments. I basked in the presence of both lives, but neither of them knew the other. One lived in New England and the other one in the Deep South, yet both lives had profoundly impacted my own. Uncle Bud was the southerner, the cotton and soy bean farmer in Arkansas who, when a young man, rivaled Clark Gable in looks. His looks were his burden. I've heard the stories. He was a hunter and story-teller and wanted us to believe that he was ornery; but occasionally, his smile gave him away. To visit Uncle Bud was to visit a library that talked. These are leaves you don't ever want to fall.

Then there was my Stepmother, Miss Willie as I called her. Though she had been born in the Mississippi Delta near the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as a young black woman, she made her way Northeast to Massachusetts. There, in Mount Holyoke, she left her mark in business. Unlike Uncle Bud, she wore her heart on her sleeve and was filled with smiles and cheery sayings. Her early years may have been doubtful, but her later years found Miss Willie traveling the world. Her life was marked by incredible personal achievement for herself and her two sons. For her, it was always about the future. When in her presence, you could imagine that you could accomplish whatever you set out to do. Like the leaves of the trees we so admire, we want such people to always be with us, but the winds come and the leaves do fall.

During this Thanksgiving season, while surrounded by family and friends, we will also have reason to be thankful; thankful for all the lives that have crossed our paths and all the leaves of human kindness that have sheltered our days. We will all have our Uncle Buds and Miss Willies to recall. As we do, the many barren trees from our lives will once again be covered with leaves and garlanded with Spanish moss as we surround ourselves with conversations from our memories. Our memories -- made, lived out and shared -- extend our lives far beyond the days of full foliage. The leaves will fall, but our memories of what we observed and enjoyed live on. On cold winter days, when no leaves are on the trees, we can look out across the landscape of our lives and smile...for we have our full foliage of memories. Today, for so many reasons, I am thankful for our ability to make memories through our daily actions that will cause others to smile when needed most.

**Special Invitation:** Once a year, we give our readers a special opportunity to bring some of our memories into their lives and the lives of their friends. Please consider our holiday gifts as another way to add to the foliage of memories for yourself and others.

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