

Seeing Tia in a Tree

My backpacking partners forged across the next pass to overnight at Nydiver Lake. I chose to camp alone. As they disappeared across the ridge in the early afternoon, I was free to roam about the shallow pools at the foot of Banner Peak where snow melts into clear cool water that cascades over rocks to replenish the deep blue waters of Garnet Lake 200 feet below.

I discovered a small campsite on a balcony with views of Banner Peak to the west and Garnet Lake stretching two miles eastward. At this cozy natural palace sheltered by sturdy evergreens, there was a majestic tree that had recently died. Apparently in its prime, the cause of death was unclear to me. Its leaves had been lost, revealing every naked twig and branch extending from its stout trunk. Now deceased, this tree was once robust and resilient against the challenging winters here at 9800 feet in the Ansel Adams Wilderness of California's Sierra Nevada range. In the late afternoon sun it seemed to thrust heavenward toward light and moisture from the clouds that grew ever more orange as the sun silently recessed and the gentle breeze subsided. Alas there were no leaves remaining to bask in the waning light.

I saw Tia in this tree. Each of those thousands of leaves represented a connection, a relationship that Tia had with a person. Each had been a friend, a colleague, a student, a relative, an acquaintance. With her untimely death each of those the sustaining conduits had been severed. What remains of that tree, of her life, at this moment is a vivid memory.

Like that mighty tree, memories of Tia will persist for many years but inevitably will weaken and fade. Twigs will fall, then branches, and ultimately that once-mighty trunk will crumble.

Years from now someone will discover that secluded campsite beneath Banner Peak with inspiring views in all directions. I hope they build a fire from the wood they find scattered there. I hope that in the warmth and glow of their blaze, they create precious memories of their time in that special place. They will be warmed by sunlight captured by that living tree many years ago. They will not know of Tia, but I do, and that memory warms me forever.

GR Davis Jr 18 August 2015