

That fall, I had traveled out from California to see Doug and Terry. The fine October weather had settled in. Doug and I liked to walk along Walden Pond Drive. I had some back problems, so we took frequent rest stops at the cul de sacs where I would sit on one of the big rocks the landscapers had put there to mark the entries. Sometimes, Doug would see one of his neighbors going to his car and he'd say hello and they would chat.

I spent the time looking across the road, meditating on the extraordinary scene of a stand of deciduous trees. Every single one of them had released its autumn colors as if to shout to the world, "And you thought we looked pretty in GREEN? Well, how about this for a little color?"

And then one day the show is over and all the leaves have fallen to the ground,

It's always struck me that Nature never does anything without making a point. A tree's annual unloading of its best part, its leaves, does not happen to make we humans sad or remorseful. Not at all. It is a glorious thing, a delirious chemical transformation of matter. The return of leaves to the soil. The release of energy back into Earth to compost, enriching the land for renewal in succeeding years.

A Doug Huntley painting is like that. In the folds of matter and paint across one of his canvasses, life and death are bound up *together* symbolically in the mystery of the immortal, cosmic process of transfiguration.

Whether in nature or art, the endless life and death interaction takes place right in front of our eyes every minute of Existence. All we have to do is to take the time to witness it, to think about it and really see it. Doug's paintings are a window into that deep truth.

That evening, a wind came up and began to blow. Calmly at first, then ferociously. It got so loud that it was hard to sleep. And yet, one felt glad to be inside, snug within a warm bed, listening to the brawl taking place outside.

Then the wind, thankfully, died away. But Nature wasn't done educating us about reincarnation.

Rain began to fall. A drop here and there followed by squalls, then a frenzied downpour of marble size dollops that banged the rooftops like exclamation points to make sure all the citizens remembered that their lives may not be as tidy and secure as they thought they had arranged things.

But, as with all things natural, there was an end. The message had been delivered. Time to assess the result.

The humans got out of their warm beds, huddled over coffee. Not Doug. He appeared in rain gear and stood at the door of the kitchen, announcing, "I need to see what's happened because of the storm." And out he went.

Terry and I continued sitting at the table, fortifying ourselves with coffee when a message appeared on Terry's phone, "Underpass flooded. No way out."

As we approached the scene at the underpass on our way to CVS, we saw a couple of emergency workers standing in the middle of two or three feet of water shoveling out the debris to clear the gutter.

Did I say debris? Remember the fallen leaves on Walden Pond Drive just around the corner? Debris?

One of the workers standing in the water with a shovel was a familiar person. He looked up at his wife and best friend as we appeared intending to take the footpath over the railroad embankment. His face said, "Go on. We got this."

That guy with the shovel, as every one of you knows without me having to tell you, was Doug Huntley. All his life Doug stood in the trenches. He was there where he was needed. Anybody who ever spent five minutes with the guy knows that about him.

As for Nature, well, all those pretty leaves along Walden Pond Drive got lifted during the night by the winds and deposited into the underpass because, well, it was *there*. A community foolish enough to put its primary escape to safety several feet BELOW grade needs to know that here in the

world of Nature, we don't care a fig about your convenience. We have bigger things on our agenda.

Doug understood that better than most of us.

My friendship with Doug Huntley began at age 14. We were contestants on Teenage Dance Time at the Channel 8 TV studios in San Diego. Doug took the trophy that day and moved on to the semi-finals. I went home.

But we had connected. And for the next 67 years, we followed each other around the country, sometimes competing, but mostly just supporting each other.

I have written about our long friendship. The stories in the books take place in the 1960s. As much as it means to me to have written them, they cannot fill the hole in my heart left by the death of my best friend.

But they help.

Thank you for listening.