

To the Core
by Lesley Porter

The rings of a tree are a snapshot of an ongoing history.
The years of plentiful rain, the years of searing drought,
can all be witnessed when a core is extracted.

People are much like trees.
In the seemingly endless days of youth,
immortality is taken for granted.
Though many children prematurely encounter
disease or even horrific abuse,
all of them are warriors who
battle the shadow-filled present
in order to live to experience
what can only be a
glorious future.

Like saplings pummeled by the wind,
youth is ever flexible, resilient.
Time cannot elapse fast enough to
match the hopeful anticipation of
all things novel and good.

Time is moving faster.
The slow ongoing aging of youth
is not particularly noticed in the rush
to fulfill childhood dreams.

Reality weeds out the less fortunate
for special treatment.
The rest usually achieve, not what they
thought they would in childhood fancy,
but an acceptable compromise.

Random appearances of mortality
are encountered by those of middle age.
A grandparent here, a cousin there.
Death is making an entrance onto life's stage,
never to depart.
The fear of one's own mortality, though,
remains in the unconscious mind, for now.

Time is marching on ever faster.
One is starting to consider the move to a
new stage of life, far from the present
maddening pressure to achieve.

Both sets of grandparents are long gone.
Fear of disease and of one's own mortality
seep into consciousness. A parent has
probably passed on by this time.
(How many years ago was that?)
The surviving parent needs to be parented.
(Which sibling will accept that
grave responsibility, that burden?)

Old age has arrived
and you have survived, for now.
Disease is not a matter of if, just when.
How long can you dodge a
debilitating disease or a terminal illness?

Each birthday seems to come
at least twice a year.
This strange law of physics is
totally baffling to the ones experiencing it,
equally scoffed at by those not yet
cognizant of hurtling through time.

A sibling is dying,
perhaps even before the demise
of the remaining parent.
It is naive to believe that life
conforms to a natural order,
not in this chaotic world.

So, we wail, we weep,
but not in front of
the less fortunate sibling,
not ever.

Salt water tears mark the end of a life,
as salt water emerging from a violent storm
unmercifully engulfs the rings of a tree.

Look to the core, the history of a life.
The joyous years, the miserable ones,
the forgettable ones, the shining ones.

It is in the nature of the mind to
suppress piteous rumination over
the imagined degree of hurt inflicted
by long past thoughts, actions, words, reactions.
In the final destination of the core, the heart,
only love remains.