



TREES COME TO LIFE FOR VIEWERS

Project Update by Grant Recipient & Filmmaker Susan Poizner

Not long ago, I was like many in the general public: if you asked me the difference between a honey locust and an eastern redbud, I would have thought you were nuts. To me a tree was a tree. I didn't realize it then, but I saw our urban landscape two-dimensionally. There were people and there were buildings. I rarely noticed plants and trees. Sometimes the things you don't understand can be invisible to you.

My awakening came about five years ago when my partner Cliff decided to populate our neglected garden with over a dozen tomato plants. Suddenly, the natural world became more interactive. After some initial hesitation, I became fascinated by the growth cycle of plants and how much nourishment they give us. Slowly I started dabbling with perennials and chatting with local gardeners. I caught the gardening bug and wanted to learn more.

I went to night school to study landscape design at Ryerson University. The horticulture and design courses were good. But it was the two "plant materials" courses, taught by the wonderful Sam Benvie, that turned me on to the beauty and power of trees. I learned to identify them by their leaves, blossoms, buds and bark. With this new knowledge, I suddenly saw the beauty of the world around me. After a lifetime of seeing the world two-dimensionally, I could now see in 3-D, and I wanted to find a way to help others do the same.

In a society where so much of our information, communication and even interaction comes via TV or computer screens, I felt that film was the best media to bring the message to the public and as a film-maker I had the experience to produce these films – but I didn't have the funds. My Jack Kimmel Grant allowed me to produce three of these films to kick off "Tree Stories," a series of short films telling the stories of individual trees. The films integrate beautiful footage of each species to help develop tree identification skills with human-interest stories to capture the imagination of the viewer.

View the films on Youtube, on www.treestories.org or via www.canadiantreefund.org.

In this pilot series of three films, viewers will hear the story of Joyce Burnell, a retired schoolteacher who led a campaign to save a 250 year-old white oak tree from the chipper. They will learn about the importance of biodiversity through the story of Torie Gervais, who wanted her father to preserve some of the American beech trees in his sugar bush which is typically a monoculture of sugar maples. And they'll hear the story of a group of volunteers (including myself) who wanted to celebrate the trees that feed us by planting a community orchard in our local park.



The potential for Tree Stories is great. Additional films could explore the history of our native red mulberry, which is endangered due to the proliferation of non-native white

mulberry trees. Or explore the Norway maple tree – a highly invasive species that astonishingly is still being sold in garden centres across the country. Another film could be about the ancient white cedar bonsais of Niagara, naturally occurring dwarf trees that are up to 700 years-old. My hope is that these stories will be rich and interesting enough to lure viewers out of their living rooms and into their local parks and ravines where they can interact with trees and learn to value them more.

I had the honour of being invited to screen these films at the launch of the Jane Goodall Roots and Shoots new Planet Re-Leaf program earlier this year. The films were also to be distributed to schools across the country by educational distributor Marlin Motion Pictures but unfortunately the company closed its doors recently so I will be placing the films with another distributor soon. Our Tree Stories website will have more information.

Thanks to the Canadian Tree Fund for helping me make these first three films. By "personalizing" trees, I hope to help others understand their magic. Trees feed us, they clean our air, they cool our homes and make our communities so much more beautiful. I look forward to the day we all see in 3-D! ♦

Previous Page: Susan and city councillor Joe Mihevc during the making of the Tree Story film, "A Call for Urban Orchards." **Bio:** Susan Poizner is a gardener, journalist and documentary filmmaker who has made 16 films that have been broadcast on stations including TVO, Canadian Learning Television, SCN and Channel M. Susan is also the founder of Ben Nobleman Park Community Orchard (pictured above). For more information visit www.communityorchard.ca.