

CLOSE TO HOME

MY FRIEND, THE CEDAR

By DAVID CAMPICHE
FOR COAST WEEKEND

I come to this precious patch of woods in the fall, after a few hard rains when the groundwater wells up like tears, and the wild mushrooms begin to sprout magical stalks and caps.

This copse deep in one of the remaining Peninsula forests has become sacred to me. A special place for being alone, for conversing with myself or with nature. For feeling the sweet breath of a small natural hideaway.

And lastly, here, not so far from home, I rendezvous with a cedar, an old-growth tree that rises high and mighty into the misty pearly skies of the Long Beach Peninsula.

This could be Clatsop County. Or Tillamook. Or one of the numerous trails that run westerly to silver sandy beaches south of Cannon Beach on U.S. Highway 101. Or the grove of cedar at the Richard Fencsak Grove that was devastated by the big blow of 2007 but rises again. You can't keep good trees down.

A disappearing species

Such a cedar as this — my friend in this hidden copse — is not so common. Around

Pacific County, perhaps only 3 percent of the old growth remains. I've written about many of them: the Nemah Cedars, the Bonker Grove on Long Island, or the large patch several miles up a logging road, just beyond the Naselle Bridge on Parpala, and then up a stream called Ellsworth. There are others, but none are common.

Once, long ago and far away, a pioneer had to follow the water, lest he or she become mired in tall forbidden timber, stumbling through an endless forest where most trails were best represented by animals big and small, and a certain allure of danger.

The advantage of getting lost

Like the Fangorn Forest in Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings," in the middle of the night, lost and miles from home, one might imagine the forest as supernatural, imposing or threatening.

Have you ever been lost in a wilderness? As a younger man, I often wandered far into the Willapa Hills, then, not so tamed, and at times, became disorientated. I've been miles from my faithful red pickup truck, hunting mushrooms as dusk fell.

Continued on Page 16



The decayed interior of an ancient cedar



The base of a thousand-year-old cedar

A massive cedar reaches at the light