

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,
Maine Poet Laureate*

Readers of this column will recall an earlier poem by Megan Grumbling about her 86-year-old friend Booker, a Maine woodsman from her home town of Wells. Here, she sees through Booker's eyes a sugar maple. "He so loved the shape of these trees," Megan writes, "that he had one engraved, in advance, on his gravestone."

Rock Maples

by Megan Grumbling

By other names, these trees seem sweeter yet;
this older one's a homage to the strength
ringing its bird's-eye grain, this best beloved
of maples, generous in sap and hue.
So near to an ideal, its silhouette.
Above the trunk, full branches grant a broad
ascension, then resolve oval relief.
A beautiful shape that that's got, you see.

Dimensions lower Booker's voice, distilled
this strong by symmetry designed, it seems,
to let the eye go idle in delight.
That maple's shape persuades vision to yield
to the gestalt of the beheld, inscribed
at once to us, unbidden, crimson, plain.
The ease becomes the image in the tree,
an order to alight upon, not seek.

The Berwick Cemetery holds it, sure
in waiting stone: this tree above his name
where one date soon now balances with new,
to crown the natural order. Soon, it comes.
The shape of it. It's perfect, Booker rules,
to look at what the shape of that tree is.
All maple branches crest, as arcs will meet
when this blank rock turns graven, and complete.

Take Heart: A Conversation in Poetry is produced in collaboration with the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance. Poem copyright © 2006 Megan Grumbling. Reprinted from the Southern Review, by permission of Megan Grumbling. Consultant to the Maine Poet Laureate, at mainepoetlaureate@gmail.com or 207-228-8263. *Take Heart: Poems from Maine, an anthology collecting the first two years of this column, is now available from Down East Books.*