

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

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

Marilyn Dunlap of Skowhegan selected this favorite poem from a previous column, writing that though it wasn't easy to choose from her folders of Take heart poems, she picked this one because it reminded her, as a member of Maine's Old Cemeteries Association, of "the many lost gravesites in Maine."

Lost Graveyards

by Elizabeth Coatsworth

In Maine the dead
melt into the forest
like Indians, or, rather,
in Maine the forests round the dead
until the dead are indistinguishably mingled
with trees; while underground,
roots and bones intertwine,
and above earth
the tilted gravestones, lichen-covered, too,
shine faintly out from among pines and birches,
burial stones and trunks
growing together
above the lattices of roots and bones.
Now is the battle over,
the harsh struggle
between man and the forest.
While they lived,
these men and women fought the encroaching trees,
hacked them with axes,
severed them with saws,
burned them in fires,
pushed them back and back
to their last lairs among the shaggy hills,
while the green fields lay tame about the houses.
Living they fought the wild,
but dead, they rested,
and the wild softly, silently, secretly,
returned. In Maine
the dead sooner or later feel the hug of rootlets,
and shadowy branches closing out the sun.

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