

Simply One Page-The Survivor Tree, for the 25th anniversary of 9/11

This piece was created from my own reflections and vision. I used ChatGPT as a tool to help shape the text from my original concepts and structure. The final form is the result of thoughtful revision motivated by my one page intent. Mike Haddorff 2637

In May of this year I made a trip to New York City. My brother and I spent the week fishing the streams of northern New Jersey, and like I often do when nearby, made the trip to the 9/11 Memorial Plaza in lower Manhattan.

I've visited the plaza several times over the years, and each time I find myself drawn toward the same place, The Survivor Tree.

This time, though, something felt different.

Summer had arrived in New York City. The plaza was full of students, families, conversations, movement, and life. People from all over the world wandered quietly between the reflecting pools. Visitors paused to read names. Some stood silently. Others took photographs.

What struck me was not only the memory of tragedy, but what human beings had done with that tragedy.

They created beauty.

Right in the middle of the memorial stands the Survivor Tree, a Callery pear tree discovered badly damaged in the rubble after September 11, 2001. It was removed, cared for, rehabilitated, and eventually replanted at the memorial in 2010.

The image above says enough by itself.

On one side is a thin, wounded tree standing alone in a naked site surrounded by dust, cranes, cables, and absence. On the other side, an image captured on May 22nd, a full canopy of green surrounded by people, shade, conversation, remembrance, and life.

Both images are true.

There is still pain in that place. There always will be. But this time my visit reminded me of something important: human beings also carry within them the capacity to bring beauty out of dust.

Right now the world feels heavy. There is anger, fear, suspicion, violence, and endless division. It's easy to believe destruction is the strongest force among us.

But the Survivor Tree tells another story. It reminds me that restoration is also possible. Not quickly. Not easily. Not without scars.

But possible.

And perhaps that is one of the most human things we do, not pretending tragedy never happened, but refusing to let tragedy have the final word.

The tree still stands there between the pools.

Alive.

And somehow, we do as well.