Sibling Plants

On a recent chilly morning walk, my dear husband Joe was telling me about a book he'd just finished that was about the interconnections between trees, other plant life, and humans. We have both been excited and humbled to learn fairly recently about mycorrhizal networks, which *Smithsonian Magazine* describes as "The fine, hairlike root tips of trees join[ing] together with microscopic fungal filaments to form the basic links of the network, which appears to operate as a symbiotic relationship between trees and fungi, or perhaps an economic exchange."

The idea that plants can actually communicate may be new to the two of us, but for the Narragansett people, and other indigenous peoples who settled this land long before European colonizers, it's always just been part of their understanding of how the world works.

I just came across an article in *Ark Republic* that quotes Cassius Spears Jr. of Ashawaug Farm in Ashaway as saying "plants are looked at as [Narragansett's] sisters and animals as their brothers." (You can read the full article at https://www.arkrepublic.com/2023/11/25/a-walk-on-narragansett-land-exploring-how-native-american-heritage-centers-the-original-american-holiday-season/).

My stomach sank a little, as I thought of the saga of the Japanese knotweed in my backyard, the non-native invasive species that was threatening to take down the centuries-old stone retaining wall holding up our property.

There's so much wrong there, I don't even know where to start. If all plants are our siblings, why must I be at war with the 2,000 square feet of bamboo-like plants that I share space with? They didn't ask to be here. They didn't migrate on their own. And what makes me think I have any right to "own" this property, that has only been claimed by white people for a teeny fraction of human history?

I have no rights. No rights to claim sole possession of a piece of the earth, despite a legal deed. No rights to kill the plants, even though if left alone

they destroy everything else on the land to become an unsustainable monoculture.

And yet, I have the responsibility to maintain that parcel, so that neighbors and passersby are safe and not infested with botanical equivalent of a deadly virus.

It really makes me understand how people across space and time have gone to war over possession of land and right to exist peacefully. And why "winning" seems impossible in the complexity of it all.

And now, it's time to water the garden.

In Peace,
Rev Denis