

On Holy Ground



I'm an amateur gardener at best. I can't speak Latin to save myself. And I struggle to say '*sequoia sempervirens*' with a straight face.

But I happen to know that California's Coastal Redwoods are the tallest, most majestic trees of all – because I recently shared a couple of hours with some, up-close-and-personal, in the dark, quiet depths of Muir Woods, near San Francisco ...

California's northern shoreline, watered by moist air from the Pacific, is the perfect location for these towering, teetering monsters. Each adult tree sucks hundreds of litres per day from the surrounding air and ground, moving the water ever skywards from its roots through its trunk to its foliage up there on the roof. And they can grow to a height (wait for it!) of

112 metres – and 7 metres thick at the base.

I mean, picture a 35-story office tower in downtown Auckland and you start to get the idea!

When you first step onto the leafy forest floor, it feels like you're in some primeval Jurassic Park. You get a stiff neck tracing the misty sunlight as it pokes through the umbrella branches far, far above you. And the silence and stillness makes you want to whisper.

Of course, you don't have to go all the way to San Francisco to see them. Rotorua's beautiful Whakarewarewa Forest is famous for its very own Californian Redwoods (planted back in 1901, then

dedicated later to the memory of NZ Forest Service men and women who died in World Wars 1 and 2). And if you've stood beneath Rotorua's Redwoods you'll know they're whoppers.

But guess what? Those breathtaking New Zealand specimens are only *babies!*

What blew me away in Muir Woods was the age of the trees we were looking at. They can easily grow to be 500, 600, 700 years old! And the oldest (according to tree-ring-counters) have been around for 2000 years or more!

Like soldiers on eternal guard-duty, these granddaddy Redwoods have seen centuries come and go ... nations rise and fall ... chiefs and emperors and presidents and kings reign and fade and die. They've watched from their lofty heights as armies have marched ... and swords have clashed ... and bombs have dropped ... and castles and cities and civilisations have popped up, only to fall into dust and decay.

They've weathered scorching fires and killer-storms. And they've endured, tall and proud, while we humans have lurched through plagues and famines and droughts and wars and nuclear stand-offs and

political ups-and-downs and stockmarket panics and more.

They've even survived global warmings, global coolings, and everything-in-between!

I was strangely moved by my encounter with the Redwoods. It felt, for an hour or two, that we were on holy ground. And I came away thinking: New Zealand needs families like those trees – tall and strong and stable. Families that can survive the good times and the bad ... mums and dads who can weather the storms and fires of parenting ... kids who can grow up deep-rooted, well-grounded and proud.

Is that too much to ask?

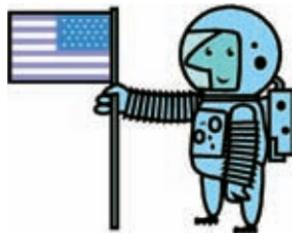
No, I don't believe it is. Because there's one more thing I learnt from my Redwood friends: *you're allowed to start small!* Believe it or not, those gigantic, enduring towers-of-timber grow from seeds *no bigger than tomato seeds!*

You see, at home, as in the forest, it's the little things that count ...



UNLIKE THE REDWOODS, JOHN (GRAPEVINE'S FOUNDER & EDITOR) IS NO GIANT. BUT HE TRIES TO LIVE BY THIS MOTTO: "SHORT PEOPLE DON'T NEED SHRINKS!"

THORT



For centuries, people thought the moon was made of green cheese. Then the astronauts found that the moon is really a big hard rock. That's what happens to cheese when you leave it out. (Jack Handey)