

ON HOLY GROUND in a Redwood Forest

Two and a bit weeks ago, on our way back to Godzone from northern North America, my wife and I experienced something unique and unforgettable. We spent a couple of hours in the dark, quiet depths of a Redwood forest, in Muir Woods, just out of San Francisco ...

I'm no good at Latin. I'm an amateur gardener at best. And I've never been on speaking terms with California's Coastal Redwoods (*sequoia sempervirens*). But these gigantic trees are the tallest and most majestic of them all. From seeds that are tiny (no bigger than tomato seeds) they can grow to a height of 112 metres (367 feet) and 7 metres (22 feet) thick at the base.

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

California's northern shoreline, watered by moist air from the Pacific Ocean, provides the perfect environment for these towering, teetering monsters. And each adult tree sucks hundreds of litres per day from the surrounding air and ground, moving the water ever upwards from its roots through its trunk to its foliage up there on the roof.

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 of the place 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 and dedicated 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 California was the age of the trees we were looking



at. They can easily grow (*believe it or not*) to be 500, 600, 700 years old! And the oldest (according to expert tree-ring-counters) have been around for 2000 years or more.

TWO THOUSAND YEARS! Try getting your head around that ...

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 been dropped ... and castles and forts and cities and civilisations have been erected, only to fall into dust and decay. They've weathered hundreds, no, thousands, maybe millions of storms that have battered other species into submission. 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 peaks-and-panics and more.

They've even (*wait for it ...*) survived global warmings, global coolings, and everything-in-between!

Fire raged through these ancient forests at times in the distant past. We saw the blackened scars high up on the trunks of some of them. And we saw others that had burnt to death, only to be replaced by a 'fairy-circle' of younger giants that sprouted from their roots.

And it's not just tourists that have wandered these paths with their heads tilted back. California's Redwood Forests have been a shady refuge for deer, racoons, shy black bears, elk with antlers, and giant salamanders ...

I like trees. I always have. But it was more than 'like' I felt that day — it was 'awe'. I was deeply moved by my encounter with the Redwoods. It felt, for an hour or two, like we were on holy ground. And it kind of put things in perspective.

I came home thinking that New Zealand needs families like those trees — tall and strong and enduring. Families that can weather storms and fires ... parents who can survive through good times and bad ... kids who can grow up deep-rooted, well-grounded and proud.

And I came home hoping that Grapevine, in 101 small ways, can continue to help make that happen.

We've been doing it now for 27 years. Year after year, page after page, we've been working to improve the quality of family life in this beautiful, blessed, troubled country. And with God's help — and yours — we'll keep doing it, and keep doing it well.

Another brand new magazine is taking shape as I write these words. It features 'LONELY DAYS & LONELY NIGHTS' — an in-depth look at that most common disease ... and it carries another interview about teenagers: 'STREETWISE PARENTING'. It will convey fun and fresh ideas and encouragement to 155,000 Kiwi homes ... and it will make a life-changing difference in more of those homes than we'll ever know.

Will you help us achieve this by adding YOUR support and sending a generous October donation? \$50



maybe? \$100 perhaps? \$500 or \$1000 if you can stretch that far? I've said it before and I'll say it again: every dollar counts. And every extra copy will go to a home that was previously missing out.

Thanks, as always, from all of us here at Grapequarters.



PS

: If you haven't already done so, please become a GRAPEVINE SPONSOR now. It's such a nice thing to do for your neighbours. Along with sponsoring several streets in my suburb, I also sponsor two schools in our area. I pay an extra \$20 a month to have a bundle of 30 Grapevines (60 mags in all) sent to those schools each quarter. It's completely anonymous, no strings attached — they go to the school office with a covering note explaining that someone who appreciates what the school is doing has arranged for these Grapevines to be delivered each quarter in the hope that they might prove of value for staff, parents, school counsellors, whatever. I've done the same thing with a parents centre I support — sending 100 copies on a regular basis, to be used where most needed.

Maybe you could sponsor a bundle for a school in YOUR area ... or a kindergarten ... or a play centre or parents centre ... or for someone you know who's involved in assisting troubled families?

All you have to do is tell us how many (\$\$ or magazines) and where you want them to go (*see coupon enclosed*) — and we'll arrange everything else.

**OCTOBER 2008 UPDATE, GRAPEVINE MAGAZINE, PRIVATE BAG 92124, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND
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