



Letting Go

A Meditation on the Tamarack Tree,
its Environment, and the Meaning of Loss

by John Riggs

Opening

Friday, Nov. 9, 2012

5:30/8:30

TAMARACK
STUDIO & GALLERY

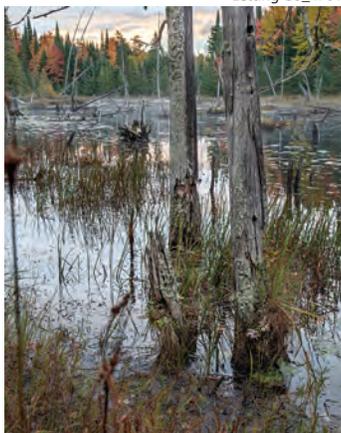
Gallery open hours 1:00/6:00
Thursdays and Fridays, and by appointment.
608-294-9499

Letting Go_4724



Letting Go_4724, 36 x 18" The Tamarack tree finds purchase on shaky ground. It is a transition zone pioneer, a key provocateur in the drama of converting lake into forest. As sediments precipitate out of suspension, over time the lake becomes shallow, giving lily pads and other sunlight-seeking, sky-reaching plants the opportunity to take root. They in turn eventually provide sufficient—if uncertain—foundation for the tentative Tamarack seed.

Letting Go_4701



Letting Go_4701, 18 x22" A would-be lover is, similarly, a transition zone pioneer, bravely seeking connection for the roots of the tree of self in another. When embarking on that risky venture our roots intertwine, encircling each other's core idiosyncrasies in an elaborate and unique set of connections, becoming inscribed, finally, in the heart of another. Families, tribes, nations are created of this tangled, magnificent web.

Letting Go_1006, 41 x24" Generally, one cannot walk where the Tamarack grows, except in winter when the water is frozen thick and covered with a blanket of deep snow. One cannot paddle there either in other seasons without becoming hopelessly entangled. Bog is the term for the

succession stage between lake and forest, the time and place when and where Tamaracks can venture to take root.

Letting Go_1006



Letting Go_2495



Letting Go_2495, 44 x24" Not unlike the response of the Tamarack to its unique environmental conditions, the unique aspects of our personalities dominate in the process of connection, at once setting us apart and validating each other's individuality.

Letting Go_3443, 19 x 24" The bog floor is a tangle of failed effort, storm-tossed logs crisscrossing each other like pick-up sticks. Root clusters from blown-down trees rise into the air like dark sentinels under moody, threatening skies. Competing for space in the

openings are impenetrable thickets of Blackberries, Buckthorn, and Dogwood, whose luscious red stems and catkins supply the only color in the winter gloom. Head down, dressed in leather welder's gloves and a heavy canvas duck-hunter's parka against briar, thorn, and blowing snow, one prays for protection in such places.

Letting Go_4868, 24 x 19" Devotion is the means by which the self expresses connection, an identification of the self with something outside itself that provides meaning and focus. The tree of self sends out roots into the soil of another reality, be it a thing, loved one, or a deity. Our roots take up nutrition, sustenance, and identity from the other. And we give of our own substance and identity, lending both subject and object meaning thereby (however tenuous), and reason (however ephemeral) to exist.

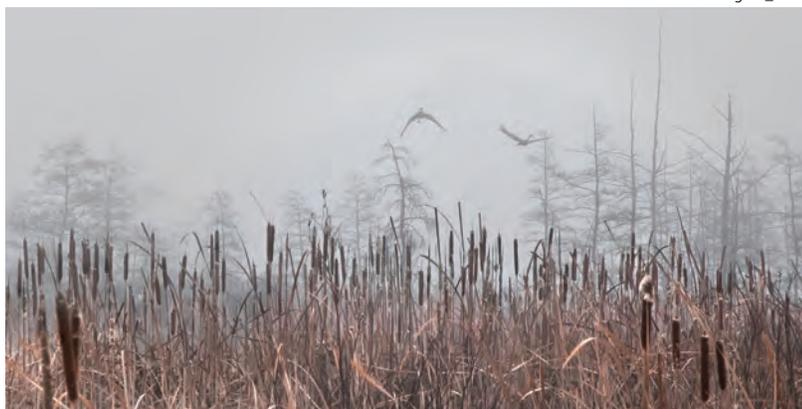


Letting Go_3443



Letting Go_4868

Letting Go_1051



Letting Go_1051, 24 x 16" To set something down to which we are devoted, be it by choice, by circumstance, or by our own folly—to let it go fully—is at once an act of courage, an invitation to sorrow, a violent uprooting of meaning and identity, and—if we are fortunate—an exercise in liberation.

Letting Go_2504, 22 x 41" Conditions are severe in this little micro climate. Freeze/thaw cycles, low nutrient supplies, high wind exposure, the coldest temperatures, along with the wettest conditions alternating with drought, all conspire to create the hardest of species—the tree the Native Americans found the most useful of all trees.



Letting Go_2504



Letting Go_3433

Letting Go_3433, 18 x 37" The self is like a tree, attaching at our roots to another tree, thereby together becoming interconnected and attached in turn to the roots of every other tree in the bog. When so mated, we feel resplendent as an individual, loving well and well-loved, belonging to and fitting into a community larger than ourselves. We feel both validated in our separateness, yet joined with others in common purpose. We are a feature in a larger landscape, and we are not alone.

Letting Go_3424



Letting Go_3424, 52 x 24" Or so it would seem.

Letting Go_3435, 18 x 37" Then comes separation. For whatever reason, life seemingly insists that there cannot be coming together without separation. Be it by death or by choice, there comes inevitably a time of letting go. As surely as the moon must wane in order to wax again, we must let go in order to love again.

Letting Go_3435



Letting Go_2518



Letting Go_2518, 24 x 24" Healing poultices of its sap were applied to wounds. Teas were prepared from its roots and bark. And the wood, known to the native woodworkers for its extreme strength, density, and corrosion resistance, was used for poles, paddles, pipes, bowls, ladles, bows, and totems.

Letting Go_0771, 24 x 58" The process of letting go is exacerbated by a certain loss of identity. The aspect of belonging, of having been a feature in a larger landscape by virtue of our love evaporates like morning dew and we shudder at the implications. Suddenly we no longer experience ourselves as coupled, as a person connected through love to others. We question perhaps even our worthiness of, or ability to love. How much of our identity is really our own?

Letting Go_2448



Letting Go_2448, 50 x 24" Interestingly, and not a little amusingly, the Tamarack is the one tree in the new world for which we, with all our mechanical and commercial advantages, have found little, if any use. In its response patterns to unique and harsh conditions, the wood shows little uniformity—a precondition to mechanized uses. The few cabins built by those pioneers hardy enough to tackle its toughness, unless undone by unnatural causes, still stand.



Letting Go_3456

Letting Go_3456, 19 x 24" My only companion on these daily winter snowshoe treks is a lone Pileated Woodpecker. A species once threatened, lover of remote places absent of humans, he seems to be at peace where I am not, to have discovered a means of rejoicing in this desolate, lonely landscape. He seems always to come within my ken, never too close, as if tracking me, looking out for me while going about his business.

Letting Go_4764, 18 x 24" The Tamarack is the only coniferous tree that loses its leaves (needles, in this case) in the fall. I do not know why; or why, for that matter, other coniferous trees keep their needles all year 'round. In any case, the growing season is short, and the simple elegance of the Tamarack form will become fully revealed against the interminable gray of the Wisconsin winter sky.



Letting Go_4764

Letting Go_4888



Letting Go_4888, 40 x 24" Whether love is ripped away by death or rage, or set down gently out of whatever necessity—a willingness to engage with the ensuing grief and loneliness is difficult to muster. A parade of distractions, obsessions, and addictions present themselves as possibilities. But sooner or later the courage and determination needed for the self to rediscover and reassert its separate identity—to let go—must emerge if the self is to survive.



Letting Go_3422

Letting Go_3422, 19 x 24" In its tenuous attachment in the bog, the Tamarack does its civic bit in further solidifying the foundation for other life, collecting little colonies of plants and animals among its roots like a mother's arms collecting up her brood. Its purchase on life is fragile and endangered, providing both the source of and purpose for its strength.



Letting Go_0806

Letting Go_0806, 53 x 18" Perhaps we ask too much of one another. What if, instead of the expectation of validation, we come into relationship already validated? What would that be like? If we were able to fully love ourselves as we are, for who we are as imperfect individuals, accepting of our needs for validation instead of denying them, would we not obviate the need for all separation except death?

Letting Go_0774



Letting Go_0774, 24 x 42" The Tamarack attains its greatest beauty in death. Until it falls, the stately shape of its thin naked trunk stands stark against the cobalt sky. Shorn of adornment, of needle and branch, it mourns its loss of dignity and the need to return to loneliness. Meaning, connection, validation, and identity—its association with cranes nesting in its tangled roots, its silhouette against the moonscape sky—must die.

Letting Go_4739, 24 x 20" And to let go, truly let go? In the end, who can truthfully say we can or have let go of attachment? Are we not all, in effect, additionally shaped, sculpted, and colored by the sum total of everyone we have loved? Who among us can say we inhabit the land of the living without suffering the pain of loss?

Letting Go_4680, 42 x 24" And why, we further ask, in light of the attendant suffering, why do we persist in the pursuit of love for another? Why isn't the love of God good enough? Even with abundant validation from a loving God, be that a God on high or some version of a higher or "true" self, no matter how happy or satisfied with our lives alone, in our quiet moments we continue to long for the love of another. We yearn for the simple joy of awakening to the glory of a new morning together.



Letting Go_4739



Letting Go_4680



Letting Go_4925



Letting Go_4925, 35 x 24" At summer's end, like its deciduous neighbors the maples and oaks and birches, the Tamarack indulges in a celebration of color before letting go. Brilliant golden yellows and oranges sing out against the bluest possible of blue October skies in an over-the-top, transcendent arpeggio of hue. A virtuoso finale, a postcard from God, wishing we were there.

Letting Go_4770



Letting Go_4770, 37 x 21" Ferns of a dozen varieties turn bronze and copper against the October blue. Water and sky merge and become one. The Leatherleaf, like pebbles worn smooth in a streambed, reflects every frequency of the sunlight in brilliant contrast. Its hues must be subdued and tamed in the computer to be credible. The darker greens of the spongy Spagnum Moss hillocks that keep our feet (somewhat) dry as we pick our way through the bog are losing their chlorophyll at different rates, creating a variegated pattern of its own mysterious design in a hundred subtle shades of puce. The occasional crimson Maple on the ridge top takes our breath away, and quickly we shift our meditation in the direction of the more correct yellows and oranges of the aspen and birch. A small Pine Snake scurries away from our feet.



Letting Go_2173

Letting Go_2173, 18 x 24" Loving another, re-engaging the individual connection to another is to be alive in its fullest, most human sense. Certainly we are not alone among the species in our experience of attachment, but just as humans are one of the few species that engage in sex for pleasure after the prospects for procreation are over, similarly, only humans engage, and re-engage in love after its loss.



Letting Go_1036

Letting Go_3816, 24" x 20' But who among us is so perfectly realized as to know, accept, and love ourselves completely? We all want to be the fully conscious individual, knowing who we are and what we want. But in truth, who does not suffer blind spots, self-recrimination, regret, remorse, fear, insecurity? Who among us, in whatever darkened corner of our personality, has not harbored the sting of shame? What is this arrogance that tells us we must be totally secure in ourselves before entering into relationship?

Letting Go_1036, 24 x 31" Never again will this tree entangle its roots with another. To let go, for a tree, is to die. Not so for us. We face the terrifying need to let go, then not die. Instead comes a little death of loneliness and sorrow, perhaps anger or despair—a period of months or years without the other in our arms, without the roots of entangled meaning associated with this love. We lose, a little at a time—through forgetfulness or distraction—that precious connection, that attachment to another that so filled our life with joy. The passage of time, finally, like water over stone, heals all.

Letting Go_0947, 24 x 10" **Letting Go_2481, 24 x 15"** Then on an early November day in the North Country, when everyone is inside by the fire and the bears are safely sedated in their dens the north wind draws one more growth cycle to a swift and sober end. The youngest of the loons, now finally mature enough to follow



Letting Go_0947

their elders south, dive for their last sustenance and flee ahead of the storm before the lakes ice over.



Letting Go_2481



Letting Go_3446

Letting Go_3446, 20 x 24" So, we experience a series of lesser deaths, as practice perhaps to rob death of its prize? In the absence of answers must we not simply proceed, in awe and reverence and fully conscious of love's ephemeral nature, to open our hearts to each other as fully as we can?

Letting Go_4632, 42 x 24" A tall enough order for this lifetime, one should think...



Letting Go_4632

John Riggs

PHOTO BY JONATHAN MOREY



Student Attended Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio; L'Universite Besancon, Besancon, France; and the Universities of Tübingen and Berlin in Germany before graduating from the University of Wisconsin, Madison with a BA in Comparative Literature in 1969.

Photographer Held various Solo Photography shows in Chicago, UW Madison Memorial Union, and University of Minnesota Mankato Art Department Gallery 1967 thru 1974, plus hung in a dozen various juried exhibitions long forgotten. During this period specialized in large format black and white landscape, nudes, and candid portraiture in nature. **Community Organizer** Program Director of Community Organization Program Account of the Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program for three years. Organized Boscobel Marketing Cooperative for local farmers to Market their Organic Produce to Urban Markets.

Stone Mason Finished masonry apprenticeship in 1975 and for six years built stone fireplaces, homes, and walls in Spring Green area—the landscape of Frank Lloyd Wright—building on his masonry tradition and aesthetic. **Engineer and Businessman** Hung up my camera and trowel in my thirties to go into the Engineering Business and raise a family, designing and building precision automation equipment and distributing machined parts to manufacturers. Founding member/partner in Isthmus Engineering and Manufacturing Cooperative in 1980, and in 1999 started my own business, SourceOne Solutions LLC. **Photographer** After some thirty years in the Engineering business, bought a Canon 5D and began exploring the brave new world of Digital Color, finally selling my business in December of 2007, returning full time to my original love, photography.

Price List

Letting Go_4724, 36 x 18"	\$388
Letting Go_4701, 18 x 22"	\$238
Letting Go_1006, 41 x 24"	\$590
Letting Go_2495, 44 x 24"	\$634
Letting Go_3443, 19 x 24"	\$274
Letting Go_4868, 24 x 19"	\$274
Letting Go_1051, 24 x 16"	\$230
Letting Go_2504, 22 x 41"	\$540
Letting Go_3433, 18 x 37"	\$400
Letting Go_3424, 52 x 24"	\$748
Letting Go_3435, 18 x 37"	\$400
Letting Go_2518, 24 x 24"	\$346
Letting Go_2448, 50 x 24"	\$720
Letting Go_1013, 24 x 58"	\$836
Letting Go_3456, 19 x 24"	\$274
Letting Go_4764, 18 x 24"	\$260
Letting Go_4888, 40 x 24"	\$576
Letting Go_3422, 19 x 24"	\$274
Letting Go_0806, 53 x 18"	\$572
Letting Go_0774, 24 x 42"	\$604
Letting Go_4739, 24 x 20"	\$288
Letting Go_4680, 42 x 24"	\$604
Letting Go_4925, 35 x 24"	\$496
Letting Go_4770, 37 x 21"	\$466
Letting Go_2173, 18 x 24"	\$260
Letting Go_3816, 20' x 24"	\$288
Letting Go_1036, 24 x 31"	\$446
Letting Go_0947, 24 x 10"	\$144
Letting Go_2481, 24 x 15"	\$216
Letting Go_3446, 20 x 24"	\$288
Letting Go_4632, 42 x 24"	\$604

All images are sold in signed, limited editions limited to 20 prints. Prints are produced using the most archivally sounds materials available. Pricing includes framing per standards as seen in the exhibit. To purchase image only without frame, reduce price by 20%. Other sizes available, contact the gallery.

TAMARACK STUDIO & GALLERY

849 E. Washington Ave., Suite 102
Madison WI 53703
608-294-9499
john.riggs809@gmail.com
tamarackgallerymadison.com