



Inspired by:  
*Descendant of a Giant*  
by Matt Smith

ID#29

**Eulogy for a Saguaro by Barbara Sparks**

It is an honor to be standing next to my fallen elder, the Saguaro. What we see lying next to me is her most inner skeleton, of hefty durable wooden spines; the structure that held her up for a hundred years or more.

It is pretty amazing I stand here to give her eulogy. I am a descendant of this giant. Only one seed in about 40,000 produced throughout her lifetime is lucky enough to survive.

In my first eight years of life, I only grew one inch and look at me now. Plump, green and healthy. She called me her pup. I am her future. How lucky is that? Everyone loved her. I loved her too.

As a seed I don't remember falling from one of her luxurious white flowers that erupt each spring from her head. Nor do I remember if a cactus wren dropped me to the ground as it rummaged through the wealth of black seeds in her fruit.

What I do remember is the protective column of shade she provided from searing desert heat as I slowly nosed upward, inch by inch each year. She also supplied me with DNA and underground nutrients while a nearby Palo Verde tree nursed me under its branches.

My dearly departed elder modeled patience and serenity that we need during long searing days before summer monsoons arrive to quench our thirst. She showed me how to store water in my expandable accordion-style pleats so I might not become bloated and tip over. I learned the difference between wild summer monsoons and gentle winter snows.

There are lots of stories I could tell about my fallen elder but one of my favorites was watching a bobcat negotiate an encounter with her.

He was a scrawny one; sunken ribcage, matted fur, soulful eyes.

It had been a particularly hot summer and I wondered how long he had gone without food or water. He swayed a bit as he approached; losing his balance he backed into my elder's tall green pole.

Everyone in the neighborhood heard him squeal, I'm sure. But that was not the end.

His bum wiggled back and forth, swaying to some internal rhythm only he could hear. His eyes scrunched and a sly smile crept across his lips. He scratched, stretched his back, looked up and with one leap swung onto the first arm above his head. He picked his way up over spines and thorns till he found a suitable berth. Watching for something to eat from this lofty bed like the princess and the pea, he, somehow, dozed as a hare peacefully grazed beneath him.

My Elder Saguaro was always generous to whomever needed her. Gila Woodpeckers would dig through her waxy green skin building nest holes for their young. Once a family moved on, other birds renovated the space for their own needs. I watched Elf Owls, Flycatchers, House Finches, Purple Martins all occupy those abandoned holes. Larger birds depended on my Elder's height as a safe place to rest.

People call us Saguaros the iconic image of the desert southwest. I wonder how many artists, like Matt Smith, created images of my Elder in her different stages of life. How I wish I could have known her in her younger years.

Indigenous peoples knew her strength, using Saguaro spines for shelters and for ramadas, for corrals and for bridges. They knew her sweetness and harvested red fruits using 30-foot-long poles to nudge them off the top of her head, scraped the inside for pulp and boiled it into a sweet syrup.

So many have benefited from her long life; all will remember her gifts. Standing next to my fallen elder, I know her woody skeleton will be here to see me grow and I will be able to witness her final transformation into the desert floor.