FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Teaching the Trees: Lessons from the Forest
Joan Maloof
University of Georgia Press
978-0-8203-2743-3
(June 30, 2005)

"We all love trees," says the author. A self-professed tree-hugger, Maloof teaches biology and environmental studies at Salisbury University in Maryland. Her fine and fascinating book is something of a family album of the beloved trees of her forest, on Maryland's eastern shore: tulip poplar, sycamore, beech, loblolly pine, oak, red maple, black locust, redcedar, holly, bald cypress, and Sweet Gum.

Maloof situates her explanations of forest ecology in well-written, personal stories. Her tale of the tulip poplar includes her experience sleeping high up in one (secured with harness, carabiners, and ropes) as part of her training at the Eastern Forest Defense Action Camp: "Sleeping in a tree gives a whole new dimension to falling out of bed. As uncomfortable as it sounds, I was happy to be 'clipped in,' and to my astonishment I fell right to sleep. I woke once in the night and got to experience the sounds of the nocturnal canopy—flying squirrels moving from branch to branch and chirping to each other. It was much more blissful than frightening, and when I woke at dawn I was happy to see that I was still up in the tree. Up where the flowers are."

In a forest, there are worlds within worlds within worlds. Consider this: pine bark beetles chew their way in to pine trees to mate and lay their eggs. The young hatch mature, and chew their way out, beginning the cycle anew. En route, the beetle, smaller than a peppercorn, picks up hitchhiking mites, which carry the spores of the bluestain fungus. "Once inside the tunnels in the sweet wood, the mites drop off the beetle and the spores drop off the mites. The spores germinate and fungus threads begin growing on the wood, soon producing new, dark-colored spores which just so happen to be the favorite food of the mites." To Maloof, unlike the foresters whose all-too-often mercenary motives she laments, these insects and fungi are not pests, but wonders. "They are not evil, they just *are*."

Teaching the Trees is a book of relationships; of minuscule forest floor flies, snails, and pseudo-scorpions, of owls and oaks, of luna moths and sweetgums. As Maloof says, "The stories go on forever." At least, they will if the forest can be defended. The elegiac subtext of the

book is the ongoing clearing and conversion of the broadleaf woodland to either lucrative pine plantations or even more lucrative subdivisions.

With science, poetry, and certain tough-mindedness, Maloof describes the plant and animal interactions that fill and sustain the forest. After explaining the remarkably complex set of relationships necessary to reproduce the tway-blade orchid, she nails the necessity: “No gnats, no fungus: no orchids.” There’s nothing insignificant in her forest or in her book. In a graceful, direct voice, with deep wisdom and down-to-earth humor, Maloof teaches, celebrates, and pleads for her family of trees, saying, “Perhaps by trying to save the forest we are actually trying to save ourselves.”