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## Become the Axe Handle

Digging the earth to plant a tree  
for a teacher who had died,  
my shovel hit something hard,  
something other than stone.  
Carefully scraping the soil away,  
I lifted an iron axe head  
into the autumn light.  
I felt its weight, ran my fingers  
over the blade dulled by rust,  
looked through the hole  
where the handle had rotted.

A world brimmed there.  
My world and that of another.  
The world of mountain,  
of forge and hammers,  
of files and calloused hands,  
of being and time.  
When we swing an axe,  
we open a world of cleaving,  
and how we become in that world  
is who we are then and forever  
after.

I continued to dig the earth,  
thinking about who buried that axe  
in the ground and why.  
What memory was buried there?  
When the wooden handle decayed  
what was released?

I uncoiled the roots of the young tree,  
kneeling at this edge of its life.  
I thought about my teacher  
who implored us to wield words  
to counter war within our hearts.  
I slipped the axe head

over one of the long roots  
that the tree might grow  
to become a handle  
holding this blade in the earth,  
until it became a pocket of ochre,  
and the tree was no longer  
its handle.

—Ian Boyden

H.J. Andrews, September 23, 2018