**PRESCRIBED FIRE**

**By William Alfred Nu’utupu Giles**

as some of the tallest trees in the world
redwoods can grow to over 350 feet above the earth
yet their roots, on average only travel 10 feet into it
in isolation, it should be physically impossible for them to stand

however, these enormous trees do not grow in isolation
their roots, each only a single inch thick
wraps around the roots of it’s neighbors
a stubborn foundation of brown fingers
clasps an underground stand
and grows

my family is a group of redwoods
that sought god instead of ground
when my mother immigrated to the united states from Samoa
she taught none of her children how to speak our native tongue

now 26 years later
I cannot feel the hands
of the land I come from
how do you stand when your roots
have been burned away

today I am a tree toppling over
a man cut off at the knees
stuck between a loved language lost
and a sky still out of reach

and that is the true legacy of world war II in the Pacific
a generation of Islander and Asian immigrants who learned
that their foreign accents and different skin
could mean your family in internment camps
learned their place in this society
could only be bought with blood in uniform
they learned their citizenship papers
would only be traded for their severed tongues
it is true

that the branches of a tree may spread no wider than it’s roots
but when parent countries
are just another word for poverty
when you are made to choose
between putting your children in culture or clothing
which blood would you want?

this is how redwoods fall
they forget the only reason
they are able to stand and defy common logic
is how well they hold one another

in Hawai’i
an immigrant mecca
where so many of us try to stand with a lost past
we have old weeping banyan trees who also came from across that sea

these banyan’s start from seeds that are blown to other canopies
and without pity or regard for past
they create their own way to the ground
sprouting aerial roots that crawl to the earth
and make a home wherever they find it

in Polynesia,
we have always learned from the earth around us
so now I do not lament my lack of roots
instead, I grow them myself

so every day I am a windblown seed
I am “foreign” accents and different skin
every day I fall towards the earth and am reborn in dirt
I am blood in uniform and severed tongue

every day, I am the blood I want
every day, I look around
hold on tight to those I love
and I grow

into an extended

family

tree