

Dear Reader,

*Little Tree* is the most personal book I have ever attempted to write and illustrate.

It's a simple, little story that contains a complex, big theme. Bigger than I can do justice to. As I held back my own tears saying goodbye to my oldest son leaving for college, I vividly remembered the day he cried at my knee, terrified, on his first day of kindergarten. These experiences and so many others in my life were on my mind and it struck me how fear grips us all at so many turns. If we hold onto that fear it will stunt our growth. Perhaps this book will mean something entirely different from reader to reader. *Little Tree* is a very different kind of book for me. Making it has inspired and comforted me and my hope is that it will do the same for others, no matter what their age.

The main character is a little tree who refuses to drop his leaves. As a result, over time, he stunts his own growth.

I approached the text for the story sparingly, trying not to over-explain what Little Tree is doing and thinking and why. My hope is that this approach will get children and adults thinking and discussing and seeing themselves in the character.

As an artist, I wanted the illustrations to be spare as well. I chose to illustrate the book from the same vantage point throughout- as though the reader was taking a seat in the audience of a theatre and watching the play unfold. There is quite a bit of white space early on. As the other trees grow, the art grows to fill up that white space. Little Tree is always in the same spot for the audience as change occurs all around him. In the same way, readers can then pick him out when he is all grown up at the end of the book.

As in every fable, animals play an important role. In *Little Tree*, the animals befriend him but also become part of the audience, encouraging him along the way.

I wanted this book to reflect a deep truth for young and old.

When Little Tree finally drops his leaves, he feels, for the first time in his life, the harsh cold of winter.

But in time...

Thanks for reading.

Let grow!