

INTRODUCTION

The white pines of Georgian Bay are best recognized as windswept silhouettes leaning away from the bay's prevailing northwesterly winds. For years artists have been drawn into the symbol of their strength and enamoured by their beauty.

It's one particularly poignant painting by Alfred Joseph Casson of The Group of Seven, titled *The White Pine*, that speaks to me. The artist depicts two white pines, one large and one smaller, alone on an outcrop of rock, their odd shapes lean toward the open water while their branches bend away from the fierce winds of Georgian Bay. The larger of the two appears to protect the smaller in a symbol of unity. They remain together, deeply rooted beneath the rock, utilizing what little soil the land has to offer.

So it is that my brother Paul and I are standing together in this life, our trunks fixed and strong as we lean into the wind and bend away from our adversities. Connected to one another like A.J. Casson's white pines, I care for Paul as though he were my own child. Even before I was born, he was there waiting for me, trusting I would help him navigate the journey of his life.

Many times while braving the winds of our lives together, I have asked why as I struggled under the burden of my brother's special needs. Still, I see Paul as the larger of the two white pines and myself as the smaller.

*Often frustrated with his slowness,
Paul taught me to be his teacher.*

*Enveloped in his unconditional adoration of me,
Paul taught me how to love.*

*Viewing him soar in spite of clipped wings,
Paul taught me to fly.*

*Watching him shrug off the bullies of our youth,
Paul taught me to stand tall.*

*Seeing him show no shame in asking for help,
Paul taught me humility.*

*Witnessing his tears spill when troubles overwhelmed him,
Paul taught me to cry.*

*And on the days when the weight of him was too heavy to carry,
Paul taught me to lean on him.*

The Georgian Bay white pines—in response to the Bay’s northwest wind—are possessed with a strange beauty, attracting paintbrushes of artists for centuries; and so it is that my own artist has found beauty in my connection with Paul and compelled me to share our story.