

MEMORIAL FOR ALISON L. DES FORGES AT DELAWARE PARK

Remarks by Irving Massey

These small trees, planted in memory of Alison Des Forges and her work in human rights, are known as “redbud” trees. They are also known as “Judas” trees. Originally probably called “Arbres de Judee” because they were thought to have flourished in Judaea, they were converted, by folk etymology, into “Judas” trees (as “beau fleuve” may have been converted into “Buffalo”), the species from which Judas presumably hanged himself, in remorse for his betrayal of Christ.

After that event, the Judas tree made its way to God with a complaint: it recounted what had happened, and pleaded that its growth thereafter be limited, so that no one would ever after be tempted to hang him/herself from one of its stout branches. God granted its request. And so these trees are appropriately small and humble, by their choice of destiny fulfilling the principle “thou shalt do no harm.” They are also covered with a multitude of pink buds in the spring, forming a kind of bower; after that, the large, heart-shaped leaves, like overlapping scales, create something like an igloo, a sheltering dome.

In pressing for the choice of the redbud over the competing serviceberry tree, which was proposed to us as a first choice by the Olmsted Parks Conservancy, I must confess to an ulterior motive. It was not only that I thought the redbud was a superior tree, but also that we have a redbud in our own back yard, and I thought we might qualify as a satellite of Alison’s installation in Delaware Park if we had matching trees. It would be something that would help to draw us closer together.

Anything that can draw us closer is what we all most need. When Shakespeare said (in *Troilus and Cressida*), “One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,” by “nature” he meant everything that is weakest in human nature, our greed, our attraction to novelty. But there is something else that can make the whole world kin. By an act of sacrifice, by giving up her life for us, Alison made all of us her kin, wiping out the differences among us: at one stroke, she made all of us members of her family; of a single family.