



## Sibling Poem

*Sibling relationships are important. While friendships come and go, you're stuck with your siblings.*

- Psychology Today

Brenda Hillman does not write as if she were stuck with her brother. Though she does not mention him by name, the warm feeling is clear in the poem “The Mostly Everything That Everyone Is:”

My younger brother, a dutiful brave person, spends his work life studying the chestnut fungus *Cryphonectria parasitica* so American chestnut trees will not entirely vanish;

i'm especially glad for his work when i'm trying to get the skins off the brain-shaped nuts with their curly exteriors.

He was the cheerful child in the family, less seized than his siblings by the idea that to please our parents even somewhat we had to be almost or completely perfect at each task.

It seems his studied fungus makes cankers of two types: either they swell or sink. If sinking cankers, the wound kills the tree; it “knows” at its wound level what a life force is. Some genes that hurt the fungus help the tree. If the tree dies, the disease has become visible or it is visible because it dies.

Most of life's processes are repeatable—at first i wrote “all of life's” but that's so not true. Nerve-like structures fall from clouds only once. A shorter dawn sets in before the main dawn. Millions rise & go faithfully to work, taking their resolve, each person clears one throat, music is note by note,

my brother gets our elderly mother up, others in his family rise, he goes to his job free of self pity, the suppressed cheer of his childhood transferred

to his lab mates who monitor the tiny lives growing without human stress, hate, intention or cruelty but also without artful song so they dazzle no one.

My brother & i are as close as the skin on a chestnut is to the chestnut, as close as bark of the tree to its uses. When our mother was sad she shut herself in her room, & when she felt better she'd come out. You have to slough some things off, she'd say, loving us with decades of feral intensity.



This poem may be an excuse to use the phrase *cryphonectria parasitica* in a poem. (A noble cause!) Scientific language & other jargon adds a weirdness to the poem which can help get readers out of our normal thought processes. (A pre-cursor for transformation if we're open.) Are you the kind of person who skips over a strange or scientific word rather than trying to pronounce it? If yes, slow down and say: *criff-phone-ek-tree-uh pair-uh-sit-ik-uh* a couple of times. *criff-phone-ek-tree-uh pair-uh-sit-ik-uh*. New neural pathways are formed when one does this.

Many of us have difficulty with siblings, so there are many different approaches one can take when writing a poem about a sister or brother. Brenda brings in science & the reference further amplifies her ecopoetics during this time of climate breakage. (...*that American chestnut trees will not entirely vanish.*) This, along with writing about family, brings in the personal mythology and deepens the intimacy of the experience of having the poem. That we learn there was pressure from her parents to be “almost or completely perfect at each task” also deepens the intimacy & is a working out of karma without being maudlin. That we would want to know more about how certain trees survive is a testament to a growing eco-consciousness in our culture which Brenda embodies as a kind of contemporary version of animism.

Write a sibling poem. If you're an only child, an aunt or uncle or any relative or close friend will do. You can use the Cover Poem technique, or you if you get a whiff of inspiration from Brenda's poem, you could be off & writing. The act of writing organically may take you somewhere else. Trust your process. If you get stuck, use Kerouac's alluvial technique where you go up a few lines in your poem, or to the beginning, & read to see if that rekindles a thought that you had at that time that still might inform the poem. You can also go back to Brenda's poem until you find something that sparks something within your poem.



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<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/family-dynamics/sibling-relationships>

[http://www.columbia.edu/itc/cerc/danoff-burg/invasion\\_bio/inv\\_spp\\_summ/Cryphonectria\\_parasitica.htm](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/cerc/danoff-burg/invasion_bio/inv_spp_summ/Cryphonectria_parasitica.htm)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chestnut\\_blight](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chestnut_blight)

<https://paulenelson.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Cover-Poem.pdf>

<https://damnthecaesars.blogspot.com/2009/03/latta-clark-kerouac-alluvial-deposits.html>