



Source: Josh White, 'Global evidence hunt uncovers horrific images', *Washington Post* in *The Age* online, 08/01/07.

Tags: [plants](#), [war](#), [child/parent](#)

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*And there are other memories, still looking
for something to bite,
like fierce, unsatisfied teeth.
They gnaw us to the last bone, devouring
the long silence of all that lies behind.*

Pablo Neruda

At the age of 84 he took to gardening. His son was glad the old man had found a hobby at last and taken up gardening. But the old man corrected him: 'I have taken to, not taken up.' There were other things he could not say and did not say. It was not as though gardening were a thing, like a paperweight or a bag of potatoes that he seized hold of and took up. And neither could you say that it was gardening that seized him. Rather, the experience was more like dancing. For a long time he had experienced life as a continuous torturous blind date—forced intimacy with strangers, false starts, fumbling, stumbling, fuming. Long silences. And then one day, hacksaw in hand, as he started to attack the ancient desiccated peach tree, it was as though his blind date turned to him and he turned to his blind date and they took to one another and moved together, gliding from a syncopated walk into a waltz.

This is how it happened. Rummaging through piles of debris in the garage he found a hacksaw, old and rusty but with teeth carnivorous and hungry. Saw in hand he wandered out into the yard, looking for something to attack. And there in the bare yard was the old peach tree which year after year remained resolutely peachless. Useless. He started hacking. The tree was resistant, the rusty saw recalcitrant, he had to bend and push and pull

and curse and shout and sweat. But the more he hacked the better he felt. Branches splintered and twigs crackled and the tree groaned and his muscles ached. And he felt as though he and the tree were moving together into a dance, as though this desecration were set to music. As he turned to the tree, to dancing, some other memory began gnawing at him from the inside, some other memory still looking for something to bite.

In his hand was a gun. Pockmarked walls and bloodstained floors.

In his hand was the hack saw. He looked at the tree and it looked back at him, a poor savaged thing. The music faded. I wonder, he thought, if I can save the tree. Blunt those fierce unsatisfied teeth.

And so he embarked upon a project of pruning. He bought tools: a pair of good quality ergonomic secateurs, a pair of loppers, a small elegant hand saw which folded up, and all the accoutrements to disinfect and protect his tools—alcohol and steel wool and a diamond file and oil. He read books and examined the diagrams. He discovered that you can shape a tree and bring it back to life. But he also read that trees don't heal, they compartmentalize. The wound is compartmentalized. New bark grows around it but the wound stays inside.

In his hand a gun. War time. Bodies. Civilians.

So he took to gardening and before too long the peach tree was bearing peaches.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Lesley Stern.