

The Earpod at its End

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Not all trees die with dignity. They often fall in the night to disease and strong winds; in the day to lumberjacks bent on profit or other vagaries. Not so, *Enterlobium cyclocarpum*, the enormous Earpod tree at Foster Botanical Garden. She went in a flurry of emotion and glory, ribbons draped around her giant trunk as a lei of aloha, one branch at a time in a three week long ritual of chainsaws and cranes that protected her surroundings and disclosed a large cavity at her base, a bark covered charcoal section possibly induced by lightning, and an ancient concrete patch deep in her core. She crowded the upper terrace with limbs and tree trunks and retained her magnificence until the last branch was hauled away.

William Hillebrand, royal physician, royal botanist, could hardly have imagined the emotions triggered by such a sight. He brought her to Hawaii over a hundred and fifty years ago after scouring the tropics for medicines and plants he thought useful to Hawaii. This tree bore witness to possibly the most cataclysmic period in Hawaii, and suffered its own indignities along the way, growing to 135 feet before succumbing to decay, massive limb failure and tree trimmers. Never one to give up, she persisted from one century through another and into a third endearing herself to everyone. When her work was done she said goodbye still sprouting seedpods, then made room for others to follow.