

Dendrology Part 2 with Casey Clapp: Updates + New Interview Ologies Podcast

December 29, 2020

Oh Heeey, it's your Podcast Stepdad who smells like garlic but is so happy you made it to this update, because it's just such a comfy, cozy catch up with an all-time favorite guest. Trees. Trees, trees. If you have not yet listened to the full episode, just beep, beep, beep, back it up kiddo; hit that first. I promise you, there's an order, it makes sense.

Also, since you made it here, I promised an update on the unnamed tree that I mentioned in the 2018 interview. Does it have a name? It's been two years, and... it doesn't. No. It does not have one. Nothing is sacred. I'm mad at everything. I'm really pissed on one hand that it is nameless, but also on the other hand I'm kind of relieved and I feel calm in my heart that it's not named after Pepsi Max, or like, T-Mobile... Tree-Mobile. Oh god. Just please, Earth, swallow me.

So, more updates on the life, and times, and adventures of your favorite dendrologist, including whether or not he calls himself a dendrologist, Casey Clapp.

Alie Ward: How are you!

Casey Clapp: Hi! Alie! I'm just doing so great. How are you?

Alie: Good! It's so good to hear your voice.

Casey: You as well, although I've heard it a hundred thousand times now. My god.

Alie: *[laughs]* I just was listening to Dendrology this morning, so I feel like we just hung out this morning.

Casey: That sounds great. We get to hang out in the morning, hang out at night. I'm drinking a beer right now, so we're all on the same page.

Alie: It's so good to have you back. Are you, like, aware that your episode on Dendrology is, maybe, a fan favorite of all, like, 200 episodes I've done?

Casey: No, I didn't realize it until recently and I'm like... it's so stunning to me. I'm so happy to be a part of this.

Alie: Yeah, honestly, when people recommend episodes to each other it's like, "You gotta start with Dendrology! That tree guy's amazing!" People *love* you!

Casey: Oh man. Well, I love them too, so it's very mutualistic here.

Alie: Now, it's winter right now... almost. We're going into winter.

Casey: Yes, we're nearly at the solstice, in about four days.

Alie: We're almost there. Now, anything new about trees that you have, perhaps, learned in the last year and a half? Anything that has recently come into your world that you felt like you wanted to share? Any new tattoos?

Casey: Oh my god! I got so many more tattoos. I was actually thinking about that. I was like, "Oh my gosh, I've added to my..." *Armoretum*, is what I call it.

Aside: *Armoretum*. That's good.

Casey: That's how many trees. It's become more than just one. It's a collection now.

Alie: Which ones do you have? What'd you get?

Casey: Let's see... So, I have a bristlecone pine tree tattooed on my chest, and that takes up, kind of like... almost a quadrant. I got a Douglas-fir cone with a bunch of little mushrooms that come out.

This is a fun thing. I learned this. There is a fungus, *Strobilurus trullisatus*. It doesn't have a common name. It's a fungus that only colonizes and grows on the cones of the Douglas-fir tree. That's it. So, quite specialized. And I was like, "I really want to get a fungus, like a mushroom tattoo, but I don't want it to be one of those kitschy mushrooms." Everyone gets that, and I was like, "Nah, it's gotta be a little bit more original."

So I found this mushroom when I was just looking through the world. If you go out to the forest you'll see it right now. And I was like, "That's adorable!" So I took it to my artist and he drew it up and was like, "What do you think?" I was like, "It's perfect! Let's do it." So I got these little mushrooms popping out of a little Douglas-fir cone.

Then I have an enlarged larch cone, like, right on the top side of my wrist. And then the Carolina hemlock, the subalpine fir, and I think that's it. I think those are all the new tree-related tattoos.

Alie: How do you pick, by the way, of all those species? Like the bristlecone pine, for example, what was it about that tree that inspired you to get a massive chest piece, which is so badass?

Casey: Oh my god! Have you seen those trees??

Alie: Yes!

Casey: All you've got to do is go look at them! And then Inspiration: Done.

Aside: The bristlecone pine is that dense, gnarled, ancient tree that one, Don Currey, cut down while during research, only to find that that specimen was the oldest known living thing on planet Earth at the time, until he killed, so... le oops.

But these Western US conifers, they look kind of like if a lightning bolt was made out of driftwood. It's just ga-gnar-gnar in every way.

Casey: I went down and saw them and was just absolutely blown away. I think they are the most uniquely beautiful trees because you can see them, and they look old. And they're tiny trees comparatively. Like, you could fit an entire one of these trees inside of a medium-sized sequoia. But it is... They're, like, literally twice as old. I don't know, I could stare at it the way that someone could stare at water or stare at fire. It just kind of captivates you.

So, that was the inspiration. I was like, "I gotta get something like that tattooed, and I really want to take up this massive space that I have, so what am I going to do?" And I gave it to the artist I work with and I was like, "Hey man, this is kind of my idea," and he drew a couple things up. And he had his iPad, and he was looking at it *while* he was tattooing me. So, it wasn't, like, a drawing that he put on me. He was kind of like, "All right, this is kind of the idea. I'm going to make it better as we do it," and he was actively judging the tree that he was looking at and then putting it on me at the same time. I was like, "This is excellent. I love this."

Aside: And when something is tattooed into your actual flesh, it really is a portable evergreen. It's a *firever-green*. On the topic of life and winter, Casey shared some dendrological myths and lore.

Casey: I did some research on this with one of my friends, and it is actually such an interesting Christianization, almost, of Pagan holidays. Basically, the idea is that there were... there's always been Pagan holidays over the solstice, and the fun thing that I learned is that... And I don't know what exact tradition this is, if it was Gauls, or Celts, or something like that, but there was a Holly King and there was an Oak King. The Oak King was the king over the summertime. As soon as the winter solstice happens, when the days immediately start getting longer, the Oak King's power would kind of grow and he'd get more strength, and he'd... The power of the Holly King would wane a little bit. Or wax? Which one means 'go away' and which one's 'to come'?

Alie: I think waning is going away.

Casey: Okay, waning. It's fading. So, the Holly King was waning while the Oak King was waxing. And then at the summer solstice, the Oak King's at the height of his power and glory, when you had the biggest oak trees, and they have all their leaves, and they're so divine in a lot of different cultures. And then as soon as the summer solstice, June 21st, comes around, then all of a sudden its power starts fading.

And then the Holly King starts coming back, and the holly is obviously evergreen, at least the one that they're talking about, the English holly, the common holly over in Europe. And he started getting more power, and more power, and then all of a sudden, you know, you have that power dynamic that comes and goes. And on the solstice they would bring in these evergreen things as a celebration of everlasting life and that kind of thing. [*"Here's a branch."*]

So, I just thought that was the most fascinating thing, where everyone... You know, you were connected to the land, you were celebrating the turning of the days getting longer, getting shorter. Then all of a sudden they took it... as religions and cultures change, they took that same idea and transformed it to a new tradition. As we look at it now, obviously the tradition's very much different than it was 3,000 years ago.

Alie: Now, what about Arbor Day? Do you celebrate?

Casey: I love Arbor Day. One of my professors when I was at the University of Massachusetts, he would always... He had a really thick Boston accent, and he was always like... I can't even do the accent. I was going to try, and then I panicked, and then I stopped. [*Alie laughs*] [*"Pardon me?"*] Maybe that'll come out some other time.

But he would always say, [*imitating Boston bro accent*] "All right, it's the most, uh, holy day of the year. Arbor Day. Go outside. Go plant a tree." And I thought that was the funniest thing because I had no idea what he was talking about when he was like, "Hey, the most holy day of the year is coming up." I'm like, "What? It's April. What are you talking about?" And he'd be like, [*Boston accent*] "Ahbah day."

Alie: [*Boston accent*] "Ahbah Day. Go to the pahk."

Casey: Yeah. "Go to the pahk. Plant a tree. Ahrright, guy." He was a kick in the pants, that guy.

Alie: [*laughs*] Now, what about... Since we talked last, you demurred when I called you a dendrologist, saying that you were more of an arborist. Do you feel like you are still more of an arborist than a dendrologist? Any thoughts changed?

Casey: Hmm... I'm going to say, a little bit yes. [DJ airhorns] And I think, honestly, I have to admit, once *you* said it, and someone starts calling you something, it's like, "Oh...oh, okay. I guess I am. I never gave myself that title, but if everyone else will, I guess I'm just going to live into it." I'm gonna take it.

Alie: Oh good. That makes me so, so happy.

Casey: Well, thank you.

Alie: What about... What are you looking forward to in 2021?

Casey: In 2021... Actually, I have a very specific thing that I'm looking forward to, and it's kind of a thing that I have to drop right now, I guess. I am officially trying to make a podcast.

Alie: What!

Casey: We're making a podcast, my friend Alex Crowson and I. It's going to come out on the 7th of January, so right as 2021 starts.

Alie: Oh my gosh! What's it called??

Casey: It's called *Completely Arbortrary*.

Alie: [bursts with laughter] Yes!

Casey: I'm so happy you laughed at that.

Alie: What's it about? What's the first episode about?

Casey: Okay, so the first episode is actually about the Douglas-fir, I believe is what the first one is going to be. We have a couple that we have lined up. So we just decided that we are going to make it about the Douglas-fir. And the whole scheme, when I pitched this to my friend Alex... I was like, "Alex, you don't know much about trees." And he's like, "You know a lot about trees." I'm like, "Eh, I do... But what if, between you and I, we get together and we just talk about trees and then we give them a rating?" We review trees as if they were a material item that someone could be like, "I'm going to scroll down on the Amazon list of trees and see all the different consumer reviews of it." That is basically what we're going to do.

We're going to introduce a tree, I'm going to talk about it and say, "Here's the facts. Just the facts. Blahblahblah." Then he's going to look at me and be like, "Um... The tree's green. It's got leaves... and that's about all I know."

Aside: Ah! Okay, y'all heard it here first. *Completely Arbortrary*. Get it? Okay, it officially launches on January 7th, but I strongly begged Casey to put up an episode zero trailer so you can find it now and subscribe wherever you get podcasts. This is breaking news, people! I am the *TMZ* of tree gossip.

Casey: But he is just a delight to talk to. We've been friends for years... probably decades by this point. And at the end of it we're going to give a rating out of... I think... What did we decide... 10 Golden Cones of Honor. [laughs] It came out just randomly when we were sitting there.

And then, afterwards, we're going to take a question that someone gives us and we're going to answer it. So if someone's like, "Hey, what is ectomycorrhizal fungi?" Then we're going to talk about that. So that's the plan. It's going to be like 30 minutes. You know, you're on your bike, you're riding to work, you're on the bus, you're driving, you put on 30 minutes, listen to Casey and Alex talk about trees. Laugh a little bit, cry a little bit. Mostly because I probably am going to rate some trees that people really like pretty severely.

Alie: I was going to say, there's got to be trees on your shitlist.

Casey: I don't know if you recall me talking about apple trees.

Alie: OH YES I remember! Agh!

Casey: Yeah, there are some shitlist trees and they're going to come out. We don't know when, you know. We've got to pepper them in there every now and then. We want to keep the vibe high so everyone's like, "This is a nice, positive podcast." But then every now and then it's probably going to be like, "We're going to be talking about the Myrobalan Plum." Oh my god. Don't even get me started!

Alie: You're going to spill the tree on it.

Casey: Yeah, it's going to be pretty rough.

Alie: I'm so excited. That comes out January 7th. And it's *Completely Arbortrary*? I'm so excited.

Casey: Oh, it *is* completely arbitrary, trust me. But it's also called *Completely Arbortrary*. Specifically, it's *Arbor*-trary.

Alie: I had a feeling. Oh my gosh.

Casey: Uh-huh! As we were discussing, I was like, "You know what, Alex? I don't think we should make a pun name." And then what do we make it? A punny name, so... You know.

Alie: Of course! You have to. Is the podcast art just going to be a bunch of your tattoos?

Casey: *[laughs]* You know what? It might as well be, but I think it's going to be a cone. We're just getting that figured out and solidifying that. We just got some of the artwork put in today, so I think it's going to be a cone, and then kind of a thing on top that says 'Completely Arbortrary', kind of arched over it.

Alie: That's amazing. So excited.

Aside: Okay, really quick break to hear about sponsors of the show, and they make it possible for us to make a donation in Casey's name. This week it goes to EcoTrust.org, which is a Portland, Oregon-based nonprofit working with Indigenous nations and private and public landowners to transition to climate smart management. EcoTrust is firm in their beliefs that forests hold the greatest potential to mitigate the effects of global warming. So now you'll hear about sponsors of the show that made that possible.

[Ad Break]

Okay, now, if you came to cultivate your own armoretum, who is a good gardener for that?

Alie: Do you want to shout out your tattoo artist?

Casey: Oh, yeah! His name is Shawn Hebrank with Bloodroot Tattoo, here in Portland. He is such a delight. Just one of the nicest people I've ever met. An incredible artist.

Alie: Does he like trees more since working on you?

Casey: You know, I wouldn't say more, but you know what I really dig and why I've kept going back to him now several times? Each time I give him, you know, a thing, "Hey, I want this," and I'm very specific. Like, "No, no. This is a *fir* cone, or a *this* kind of cone, or *that* kind of cone," rather than "a pine cone."

Maybe that's a myth I should... Everyone will always say, "That looks so... I love that Doug-fir pinecone." No, that's a Doug-fir cone because it's not a pine. You see? It's one of those

things where you learn it, and then you, like, for 30 seconds start calling people out. Then you realize that you're trying to, like, stop a tide, and you're like, "Just let it go. It's not that important."

So whenever I give things to him and I'm like, "Hey, Shawn, I have this very specific thing with this very specific purpose with these very specific biological meanings," he picks up on it and, like, finds it to a T, and then *knows* it. I told him about this fungus, and then he looked it up himself so he was making sure he was drawing it right. Then when he posted it on his social media, he called out the fungus by the scientific name and all these things. It was like, "You're the best!" He takes it, I guess, personally, and then really gives it a good piece of art because he knows exactly that I'm not looking for just, like, "I want a pinecone." Like, "No, I'm getting a Carolina hemlock cone. It looks exactly like this. Don't just randomly look up hemlock cone or some other random stuff."

Alie: Yeah. You know, when something is on someone's body until they die, that's a lot of responsibility, right? You don't want to be like the 'No Regrats' tattoo of trees.

Casey: [*laughs*] Exactly. I agree. I have to think about that whenever I see everyone else's tattoos, and I judge them... Not judging them like 'is that good or bad', but I'm like, "Okay, I know that's a Ponderosa pine but those are not pine needles. What are those??" I've seen tattoos like...

Okay, let me give you an example. Things that are in the family, Liliaceae, they are defined, more or less... more, by having things in parts of three. So, every lily that you've ever seen or anything in the lily family will have three petals, three sepals, or six, or nine, or twelve. It's always in multiples of three. [*"These things come in threes."*] And so, I saw this... This was some random book years and years ago where it was clearly a lily, like one of those big lily flowers that you can get from, you know, half the stores when they're in bloom. It only had five petals. I was like, "Uh oh. Someone didn't do their research!"

Alie: [*laughs*] And the more permanent it is, honestly, the worse. You know?

Casey: Exactly. My first tattoo... I don't know if I told you this. It's a backwards music note.

Aside: Oh man, buckle up 'cuz you're about to love this guy even more.

Casey: Did I tell you this?

Alie: [*eager*] No.

Casey: Oh my god. So, my very first tattoo, I think I was a freshman in college, and I was like, "I'm gonna go get a tattoo. It's gonna be great. I'm... I'm... I'm cool!" And then I went to get it and was like, "All right, I just want this music note..." I think it's a quarter note. It's a music note; one that comes up, then goes over, and goes back down. So I put it on, and I was looking in the mirror, and I was like, "Aw man, no. It's backwards! We gotta flip that around." And the tattoo artist was like, "All right, yeah, cool. Let's flip it around."

So we flipped it around, we tattooed it on me. I was super stoked, and I went over, was showing my friends, and all my friends were like, "Ah... [*hesitation, then feigned excitement*] You got a tattoo, Casey! That's great..." And a week later – they couldn't bring themselves to tell me – we were all, like, sitting around, hanging out at one of my friends' apartments. They were like, [*bursting*] "Casey your tattoo's backwards!" Like, all at once they just, kind of, shouted it out.

And I was like, “What??” Then for the first time I actually, instead of looking in the mirror, I looked down at my own chest and I was like, “Oh my god it IS backwards!” And that’s been a thing. Another friend was like, “Just get all your tattoos backwards now. Who cares?” So, my very first tattoo.

Alie: [*laughing*] Did you ever correct it, or...?

Casey: No, no. I think if I had to correct it, it would get, like, three times as big because I’d have to get... like, the lines for the bar would have to be, like, big enough to cover the rest of the tattoo. So, no, I just have a backwards music note tattooed on me.

Alie: [*laughs*] Oh, no. It’s a lesson just to leave well enough alone.

Casey: Exactly. But let me tell you, every time I look at it in the mirror, I’m like, “That’s a perfect music note.”

Alie: You’re like, “I’ve got a shitload of backwards cones, but that note is on point.”

Casey: Exactly. “That note is *perfect*.” Yeah, that’s exactly it. You know, it’s a personal tattoo. That’s what I realized.

Alie: [*laughs*] Well, the last question I wanted to ask for this refresh is: What ology would you really want to hear about?

Casey: It would be... I am so fascinated with, like, how cities are designed, and like what makes them work, and what doesn’t make them work. Obviously, I work in a city so I’m constantly, like, bombarded with this, but you have the engineers who are trying to figure out how to make stormwater flow perfectly off the side of this curb down into this thing. And then there’s other people who have to deal with, like, “Where are the streetlights going to go?” And then they do all these individual things. But just the larger planning where everyone’s like, “All right, we’re going to make this city *really* cool, and here’s how, and here’s why,” that is something I find fascinating.

Alie: Ah, that’s a great one. That’s an awesome one. I just recorded one with an Urban Rodentologist and we talked about sewer rats under Manhattan.

Casey: That is terrifying. I heard a story where a guy fell into, like, a vault under a Manhattan sidewalk, and there were rats... like, it was *filled* with rats. I was like, “That is a literal nightmare.” Oh my god. I hope that guy’s okay. He couldn’t even...

Alie: Did he survive?

Casey: Yeah, I think he did. But he couldn’t scream. He was down there for, like, 45 minutes with rats all around him until they could pull him out, because he was like eight feet down. And he couldn’t scream because a rat would run in his mouth. It’s like, “Oh my god! I’m shaking right now.” [*laughs*]

Alie: I will say, I did an episode with someone who studies, like, gratitude, and depression, and what to do to get yourself out of a funk, and smelling trees and, like, phytochemicals in general, for like 20 minutes a day was said to make people a lot happier. That might be the secret of your success, sir. Like, it just might be why you’re just the coolest, jolliest person, because you’re in trees all the time.

Casey: Man, I hope that’s the case. You know what’s funny about that? There’s a famous arborist, or, like, researcher, and his slogan was, “Touch Trees.” Alex Shigo was his name, so all of his books, you open it up and on the very front they say, “Touch Trees,” because he’s just like,

“Go out and touch trees. People don’t do that anymore.” So maybe that should be my slogan from now on, “Smell Trees. It’s going to make you so much happier.” That’s great.

Alie: [laughs] Get to it! I checked today; you have 9,000 Instagram followers.

Casey: I just hit 9,000 like three days ago.

Alie: What did I tell you, dude? I texted you the day before it went up and I was like, “Casey, you get that Instagram up?” And you’re like, “I’m in the middle of the forest.” And I was like, “You got cell service. Put that up, because trust me, people are going to want to learn about trees with you.”

You know, book agents, lit agents, how do they get in touch with you? I guess they DM you on your Instagram?

Casey: You’ve become my social media manager just by, almost, slapping me in the head and being like, “Casey, just go do this. Jeez. Get it done.”

So ask charming and knowledgeable people gnarly questions, because it’ll change the way that you look at those limbs out the window. And plus, we’re all going to die one day, so you might as well just appreciate things more and ask about them.

You can follow Casey on [Instagram](#) @Clapp4Trees, as well as his podcast. Both of those are going to be linked in the show notes. His podcast is *Completely Arbortrary*. You can already subscribe to the trailer and get the first episode when it drops on January 7th. I think that we should all wear brown pants and a green sweater on January 7th and celebrate. Who’s with me? No one? I’m doing it anyway.

We are @Ologies on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#). I’m @AlieWard on [both](#). You can be a patron at [Patreon.com/Ologies](#). We have so many good episodes coming up you can submit questions for. *Ologies* merch, including masks, which I know you’re already wearing, is available at [OlogiesMerch.com](#). Thank you Shannon Feltus and Boni Dutch of the comedy podcast *You Are That* for managing the merch.

Thank you Erin Talbert, Emily White, Caleb Patton, and Noel Dilworth who all make this show possible with their very hard work, as well as assistant editor and full-time hottie, Jarrett Sleeper. And Treeven Ray Morris, aka Steven, who hosts *The Purrrcast* and *See Jurassic Right*. Nick Thorburn wrote the theme music.

If you stick around until the end of the episode, you know I tell you a secret. This one is that sometimes when walnuts go bad, they taste kind of like if you ate paint, but I kind of like them that way because it kind of reminds me of moving into a new place and having, like, fresh adventures, and getting to put your stuff in cabinets and stuff. Anyway, I think this means that the walnuts are rancid, but I haven’t died yet, so it’s going fine.

All right, see you back next week. We’ll have full, brand-new episodes all for 2021. Meanwhile, I’m just going to be on the couch eating stroopwafels and bawling to the new Pixar film. Also, covid is still very much a thing, so let’s all stay in for New Year’s, shall we? Yeah? Okay, great. Touch some trees, huff some bark. Berbye.

Transcribed by Emily White

Some links which you may find useful:

A donation went to EcoTrust.org

[What is dendrology, exactly](#)

[Stanford's Less Shitty Mascot](#)

["The storm was too much for it."](#)

[Canopy shyness](#)

[Trees are sentient, and other mindfucks](#)

[Secret Life of Plants aka ESP with plants](#)

[David Attenborough's Private Life of Plants](#)

["Hidden Life of Trees," Casey's book reach](#)

[Lorax's "Unless" prophecy](#)

[All the maple syrup info you'll need](#)

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