

Shut Up and Listen!

A Journal of Thoughts, Issues and Experiences

EMPIRE OF THE TREES

The first twenty minutes after leaving Bogota, Columbia our tour bus was full of high spirited chatter. The twelve of us never really expected what we were about to see. Thirty minutes into our trip everyone started to slow their conversations as they started looking out the windows of the old, faded tour bus. Everyone started retreating back into their own thoughts. As silence shadowed the bus's human cargo, a feeling of anticipation and vigilance filled our silvery walls.

The change in attitude was brought on by the increasing amount of life surrounding us as our encumbered vehicle trespassed seemingly unconquerable terrain. It was quite sudden, but there we were surrounded by walls of green that reached at least a hundred feet in the sky. Not straight up, but trying to reach inward and make a union far above our heads, almost to enclose the small patch of barren jungle floor.

As our driver pulled over, nearly blocking the entire road, our guide informed us that this was where we were going to start our three night, and four day stay in the jungles of South America. As we filed off with our supplies, we watched our one way home disappear as it rounded the next growth entangled corner. The same look occupied everyone's face as our journey began; it seemed to say, "We're not in Kansas anymore."

To anyone that has seen the movie "Star Wars," at that moment it was conceivable to believe in The Force. The jungle seemed to have a life of its own aside from all its residents that are fighting for their own survival. From my first steps on the road that was slowly but surely being reclaimed by the immensity of life, I could not believe humans and their technology were trying to destroy land that holds so much and takes up so little space.

Standing on the narrow wedge of civilization gouged out of the jungle's floor, I wondered how we could possibly drive our way any distance through such dense ground cover. I was soon to learn that once you cut through the outer growth it would be pretty easy traveling from there.

Breaking through the underbrush that grows incredibly thick anywhere sunlight can reach, I emerged on what appeared to be a different world. A world obscured by hot vaporous clouds of steam trapped by the dense tropical canopy that hung ominously far about my head. There was an awesome wall of life directly behind me now, but ahead of me, coupled with the echoing sounds of animals unseen, and descending water that had pooled in the

growth far above, was the unexpected sight and smell of decay. Standing in front of me everything was different shades of brown.

The ground was thick with dead leaves that excrete water and the scent of decomposition with every footfall. Tree stumps wound their way to the canopy roof, taking the shape of twisted diseased fingers and spiraling vines dissenting to the life-giving soil. There were

shadows everywhere, except small penetrating rays of sunlight that carved a deep wound in this unconcerned realm.

Areas like the one I was standing in do not make up the majority of jungles; it's just that this area had such a thick canopy that the ground was entombed in perpetual darkness and heat. I later had the opportunity to climb to the palace roof of what I consider to be the empire of nature, a true kingdom of trees.

While struggling through the entangled fortress roof, I had never seen so much intensity of color, flowers and leaves in brilliant blues, yellows and reds. My first glimpse of wildlife came here also, birds the same colors as the flowers, insects up to the size of my hand scurrying about. When I broke through the top, I found a solid carpet of rolling green fabric dotted with sunshine reflecting off leaves, and flowers that had found homes so far above the ground. I also saw the silhouette of exotic birds through the escaping mist that will return as rain another day. The first few hours of my endeavors in the tropical rain forest held incredibly strong feelings that will stay with me always.

Even though the remaining days were filled with danger as well as picturesque surprises, the aura I felt radiating from the jungle when I first entered ten paces off the road was inspiring. During late night campfires one thing kept coming up how could anyone destroy such a place? My companions and I could find no explanation. All of us knew we were nothing but visitors; we respected and honored that by leaving the rainforest as unspoiled as it was before our intrusion. Someday, I might have a son and I pray he too will have the chance to see the empire of the tree.

By Michael E. Meyer

MAKING WAY

September 10, 1991, had been just like every other day that week. I had gone to school. I had come home, fixed a snack, and I was listening to the radio. Then the telephone rang. It was my mother. She said that she loved me and she had something very important to say to me. She didn't want me hanging around downtown anymore, and no more older guys either. At this point

that element. But, as time went on, I began not to care, I had my own life. Besides, I didn't like her that much anymore. She couldn't be trusted. She was always lying. So, when my mom told me that Heather had been killed, I wasn't exactly sad. All I could think about was that she wasn't going to be around anymore, and it was difficult for me to grasp that concept. My mom eventually got off the phone, but she told me to watch

downtown. And, as always, the media was there. The service lasted two full hours and was boring as hell.

For starters, my uncle didn't know what he was talking about. Then everybody who wanted to came up and said how they felt about Heather. A lot of people had written poems and songs, and others just got up to the podium and babbled on like idiots. After all that, my friend Brandi sang four sad and depressing songs about letting go and getting on with life. Then the pallbearers opened the casket. could not believe that they were having an open casket funeral. At least not what after my grandmother told me. (In my grandmother's truly eloquent way she told me Heather was 'slashed ear to ear'. Ah, spoken like a true poet.) Besides, it was my first funeral, and I wasn't sure I wanted to see an actual dead body.

Curiosity got the best of me, and I looked. Heather seemed unnatural, bloated waxy, and sick. My other cousin that flew out from North Carolina, said I'd feel better if I touched her. I touched her, but I didn't feel any better. She was so cold that it surprised me. (And why wouldn't she be? Heather was dead. I had to keep telling myself that...she was dead.)

Finally, the funeral ended, and our immediate family went to Diane's house. We wanted to watch T.V. to see what particular parts of our lives they were going to send over the air waves. My cousin, my sister, and I showed up on the 11:00 news. Incredible! About a week later my grandparents insisting that we go, dragged us to the site where Heather was killed on Sandy Boulevard. It was in the alley next to the City Center Motel. The stain from her blood was still visible on the cement. The stain was the same color that fallen leaves make when left on the sidewalk.

Now she's gone, cremated, in a wooden box on top of a piano. She's not coming back, ever. I'd like to say that she'll live on in the hearts of people forever, but those people will eventually die, too. The most that can be said is that she provides some good fodder for an English paper. Heather's death was an important act in the story of my life. It's not so important because Heather, that particular person, died but because of the whole idea of death. She was the first person I knew who died, and it was magnified by the fact that she was young and that she was brutally murdered. For me, Heather's death was the final break from innocence into reality, from childhood to adulthood.

By Jessica Ashard

Why Shut Up and Listen?

Rich in ideas and analysis, papers and articles written by the students and staff of Clackamas Community College usually do not get noticed by the larger college community. Yet much of this work is clever, challenging and perceptive.

Shut Up and Listen is a small collection of student and staff writing on a variety of subjects. The work has only two things in common: It was submitted to Joe Uris in the Social Science department in response to an invitation posted in the English and other departments. And, whether long or short, from faculty or student, it is fun to read. So take the time to look the work over. While most was not designed for formal publication, all of these articles are the work of people who reason well and are not afraid of ideas.

- Joe Uris

I was trying to figure out what I had done wrong and what the punishment would entail. But my mom wasn't finished." Jessica, last night I heard that an unidentified 16 year old girl was murdered and that the police were looking for her boyfriend as a suspect in the case. This morning your grandma called me up and told me that girl was Heather." "So Heather's dead?" It obviously was not sinking in. Heather is my second cousin, that is, she's the daughter of my mother's first cousin, or even simpler, she's the granddaughter of my grandmother's brother. The point is, we were related. But, I haven't known her all my life. About three years ago Diane, my mother's cousin, and her three kids, Heather, Justin, and Heidi, moved to Oregon from Denver Colorado. Diane moved to escape a messy divorce, and to get to know her real mother better.

Diane's mother ended up ignoring her, so my family took them in. Consequently, I got to know Heather really well, in fact we were the best of friends the first year she was in Oregon. Heather was a very pretty, robust girl, but very promiscuous and stupid. She was by my definition, white trash. In looking back, it's hard for me to see why I everyone liked her. Heather hated being in Oregon. In the time she was here she was kicked out of two private schools and dropped out of another. She eventually ran away and started living on the streets of Portland. She got into a lot of drugs, and fell in with a real nasty crowd. She was hanging out with this real ratty guy. I, unlike most of my family, had a more realistic perception of what was going on, mostly because I saw her a lot in

the news.

I turned on the television to find Diane on Channel 2 sobbing about Heather. More news stories about locating Franklin Dasher, Heather's boyfriend and suspect in her murder. Photographs of the murder site were splashed all over the T.V. screen. It was so surrealistic. The news stories were just like all the other news stories about all the other girls who have been killed at a young age.

Except, instead of actors from a different story, they were actors from my story. The next morning, the story was on the front page of the newspaper. A mug shot of Dasher was accompanied by a picture of Heather (one my grandma had taken, and if the newspaper had shown the whole picture, I would have been in it.)

The following morning on the front page of the paper, the story continued with Dasher being apprehended in Vancouver. More news stories appeared on television that night. More sobbing from Diane. More pieces of the story of my life being broadcast through the media. And all I could think of was how weird it was, how unequivocally bizarre it all was. September 13, 1991, was not just like any other day. It was Friday the 13th, my mother's 36th birthday, and the day of Heather's funeral.

The service was held at Beaverton Seventh Day Adventist church. My Uncle Vinnie, who thinks God talks to him, did the eulogy. And tons of people attended. Family and friends that flew in from Colorado, bus loads of kids from all the schools Heather had attended, and a large crowd of kids she had hung out with

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