

# Local women's land celebrates 40 years

BY BILLIE MIRACLE

This summer I was invited to attend the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Applegater* at Red Lily Vineyards. I offer my congratulations to the staff and everyone who has kept the community newspaper vital for two decades now.

**2014 is also the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of WomanShare**, a women's land community here in the Applegate Valley. In 1974 some friends and I decided to travel west to find a place to start a women's commune. As young and idealistic feminist political activists who had gone to Canada during the Vietnam War, we believed that it was time to return to the U.S. and be part of the political/social transformation that was happening at the time.

As we drove through the Applegate Valley in 1974, the beauty of the snow on the mountains above the forested, green valleys captivated us. This is where we wanted to live. So we pulled into a local

motel and gave ourselves a week to find some land. We met a 70-year-old woman realtor who showed us several places, one of them up a dirt road in the Murphy area. She told us that the road was impassable in the winter. Of course, that seclusion felt perfect to us. She also said there was enough good wood in the two old houses to build one new one. This was a little daunting because we didn't know how to build anything at that point. Forty years later one of those houses is still standing as the main house for the commune.

**The most important characteristic of this new life** was the social/communal aspect. As we settled in we realized that we had few country skills, but gradually learned how to use chainsaws and grow a garden and eventually gained the skills to build our own cabins. Knowing that we had to make our land payments, we developed workshops on art, music, country skills, social-class awareness,

communications skills, and spirituality. In our countless meetings we worked hard at learning how to share resources and consequently developed a sense of community. Each of us had been brought up in a two-parent home with traditional religious and political beliefs; all of that was up for question. Nontraditional family structure, shared living spaces, and techniques of communicating were challenges that we took on. Like many idealistic young people, we thought that we could influence cultural transformation on a monumental scale, starting from a small community model that we were certain would change the world!

**Through the years we have built five cabins, created a huge garden**, and contributed a safe, women-only space for many women. We have participated in local politics, worked with our neighbors, held events and gatherings, and helped to develop a strong women's

land alliance from Roseburg to Ashland. We have been courageous advocates for feminism, lesbian and gay rights, domestic-violence awareness and activism, and educational opportunities for people in generational poverty.

**And now, 40 years later... how did our lives change?** One woman became a naturopathic physician, one a social worker, one went to Rogue Community College and then became a landscaper for the City of San Francisco, another worked in construction. When some of these founding members left, others arrived to continue the work of building WomanShare. I stayed in the valley and have been an educator—doing work similar to those workshops we started so long ago, and thus helping people change their lives.

Forty years have passed in the blink of an eye, and the Applegate Valley has given much to everyone in this local region. I offer my gratitude to the *Applegater* for bringing us all together.

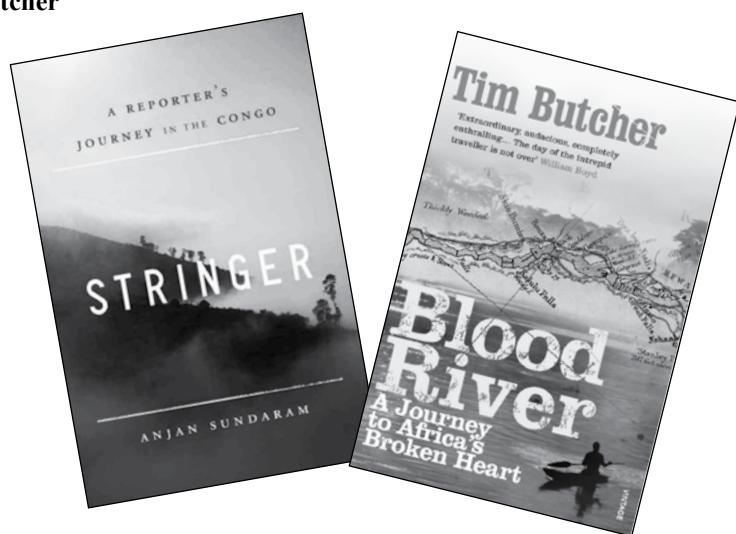
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## BOOKS & MOVIES

### — Books —

**Stringer: A Reporter's Journey in the Congo**  
Anjan Sundaram

**Blood River: A Journey to Africa's Broken Heart**  
Tim Butcher



Here are two superb nonfiction books about the Congo, books for armchair adventurers. Both books are shocking, chilling stories of bravery, danger, and high adventure. The books are: *Stringer: A Reporter's Journey in the Congo* by Anjan Sundaram (Doubleday, 2014) and *Blood River: A Journey to Africa's Broken Heart* by Tim Butcher (Random House, Great Britain, and Grove Press, US, 2007). Among other glowing reviews, John le Carré called *Blood River* a masterpiece, and the American Booksellers Association named Sundaram's book one of the best debuts of 2014.

The history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo can be considered in three parts: hundreds of years of slavery perpetrated by the West, followed by colonization in what was called the Belgian Congo, presented to the world as a "modern" state, but it was a state in which native Africans died in the millions, worked to death, forced to toil on rubber tree plantations where they often had their hands chopped off for not producing enough rubber. Baskets of severed hands were brought to the overseers at the end of each day. Then the independence revolution in 1960 resulted in brief joy with democratically elected Patrice Lumumba. However, 35-year-old Lumumba, after less than three months in office, died under mysterious and brutal circumstances associated with our American CIA and the Belgians. "Lumumba's mistake was to hint at pro-Soviet sympathies. The mere possibility of the Congo, with its huge deposits of copper, uranium and diamonds, falling into the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War was too much for the Western powers...so Brussels, with the connivance of Washington, engineered Lumumba's arrest, torture and transfer to the capital of Katanga...His body was never found" (*Blood River*).

Chaos and the most extreme corruption have been the lot of the Congo ever since.

Both authors, Butcher (British) and Sundaram (East Indian-American), each a news reporter, look at this horribly troubled history as they tell of their modern treks near and on the great Congo River. Butcher was determined to follow Henry Morton Stanley's 1870s route from beginning to end along the Congo. He is met with constant disbelief that he would attempt such a thing, bureaucratic refusal, warlords and other dangerous characters—along with native kindness and their often capable assistance in the forests and in navigating the river. He makes the trek on foot, on the back of sputtering motorbikes where available, and in dugout canoes when such is the only possible passage. The Congo is the world's deepest river and has the world's second-highest volume of water. The river is shaped like a sickle, with the point of the "blade" beginning in the southeastern part of the vast country, curving north and west, then south, with the "handle" emptying into the Atlantic Ocean past Kinshasa, the capital.

Diogo Cão's discovery in the 1480s was later described as finding the mouth of the Congo River to be so violent and so powerful that sailors were amazed to come across fresh drinkable water 200 kilometers out into the ocean. [According to Wikipedia, Diogo Cão was a Portuguese explorer and one of the most notable navigators of the Age of Discovery, who made two voyages sailing along the west coast of Africa to Namibia in the 1480s.—Ed.]

Maniema is a town at the northern curve of the sickle, which missionaries and NGO (non-governmental organization) workers, unlike Butcher, reach only by plane. For good reason: "Maniema's reputation for cannibalism, which Stanley [of the famous "Dr. Livingstone, I presume" greeting—Ed.] noted repeatedly in his writings, continued to the modern era. In the 1960s it was in Maniema that 13 Italian airmen of the United Nations were killed and eaten, their body parts smoked and made available at local markets for weeks after the slaughter" (*Blood River*). Sundaram writes of warlords and roving militias, groups that force horrors such as self-cannibalism on their victims.

There is a charming Congo myth that God, growing tired from creating the world, rested by setting his bags of diamonds and gold and other treasures down in the Congo. Each of these books details the very *uncharming* modern scramble for the Congo's amazing riches in lumber, gold, tin, cobalt, copper, diamonds, uranium, and rare earth minerals. Sundaram tells of illegal uranium mining, the "yellow cake apparently being excavated with bare hands for exportation to North Korea and Iran." Each author provides details about how money for the country's coveted resources goes not to benefit the Congolese people, but, rather, to enrich terror groups and unspeakably corrupt government officials.

Why bother with harrowing books about the Congo when we have the Middle East and Afghanistan and Ukraine and a rumbling Russian bear on the news every day? Africa is a huge part of the world, and the Congo is a huge part of Africa. I like to be at least marginally informed, and it's important to know that many in the industrialized world are very aware of what the Congo contains and are busily extracting that country's valuable resources posthaste.

Plus, there's that spirit of adventure—armchair adventure.

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**Ed. Note:** The reviewer is the author of *She Caves to Conquer*, a book about a young woman who escapes the Midwest, moves halfway around the globe, and finds caves that have been occupied for nearly 4,000 years.

### — Movie —

**Earth to Echo**

Reviewer rating: **3.5 Apples**

PG; Action/Family

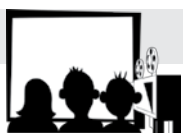
Opened: July 2014

A Walt Disney Studios Motion Picture



**1 Apple—Don't bother**

**5 Apples—Don't miss**



Hi! The movie I chose to write about is *Earth to Echo*, which is about a group of friends who have to move away from each other because of a highway being built through their neighborhood.

One day all of their phones "barfed" and a strange shape appeared on their phones. After a while of studying their phones, they found that the strange shape was a map. After following the map, they found a robot. I'm not going to say anything else so I don't spoil it.

So, overall the movie was worth three and a half apples because in the beginning it was kind of confusing.

Well, thanks for listening to my opinion!

Carlen Nielsen, Age 10  
Williams

