

LIMB IN GOD'S VALLEY

With Tree Sitters established in the three remaining areas yet to be cut, commitment was building and awareness was being raised with bits and pieces of media attention. A fund raiser event followed not long after at the Nehalem Bay Winery to support the Tree Sit. I was trying to line up a small group of kids, along with a reporter from the *Daily Astorian*, to share an educational experience in the forest, hoisting themselves up into the trees of God's Valley. Unfortunately, the events that followed in the next few weeks put all except the continued tree cut on hold.

Then came September 11, with national grieving and all media attention focused on the impending worldwide war against terrorism. This and all other emotions have altered our collective consciousness, putting us in a pattern of fight or flight, and as everyday life and business continue there is a prevailing psychic numbness that tries to contain our human spirit. As we look for leadership and that which seems most familiar, it seems easiest to ignore reality and in busyness continue the usual. The economics of the forest are unhampered by national tragedy and ODF stands strong, while backed by the forces of patriarchal duty that enforce what they believe to be economic law and order. The elder trees continued to fall.

Logging of the second area in God's Valley began on Wednesday, October 3. On Thursday another call came into the Community Store, this time from KMUN. A woman had called the station from the forest of God's Valley desperately trying to let people know what was coming down. Matthew 'Ridge' Hill free-climbed a tree in the darkness of the night before and was attempting to stop further logging in Area 2 of God's Valley. Three women were arrested that Thursday while attempting to document the confrontation between 'Ridge' and the true outlaws of the forest. Tom Hood from KMUN and myself were seemingly in charge of sounding the forest action alert alarms on the north coast of the county. All was on standby. By Friday a state of emergency was coming down among activists as media attention shifted from the outcome of September 11 to God's Valley. Receiving a call from Cascade Forest Alliance, all were informed of a direct action 'On The Line' plan for Saturday noon. The alert went out over the airways once again and bulletins were posted.

My emotions were mounting, feeling a part of what I believe to be a collective psychic alignment between the trees that held and surrounded 'Ridge' and all those involved. I was obligated to my daughter Cedar, the responsibilities of the Community Store, my community, and the forest of God's Valley. I can truly say it was an awesome time sequence of events.

Friday afternoon I found myself sharing as a chaperone with about 50 Astor School 3rd graders on a field trip to the local Cathedral Forest. It seemed incredibly profound to witness so many children of our community and observing their view of the forest and the ancient trees that stood before them in light of what was happening in God's Valley.

The collective connection continued Friday night. Little did I sleep feeling the torture the humbly committed man named 'Ridge' must have been experiencing. No food, no water, no shelter, 40 degree temperatures, dehydrated and approaching hypothermia while perched out on a limb 80 feet in the air. I can truly say it was a dreadful night.

Saturday morning I had to open the Community Store. I made arrangements to leave by 10 a.m., my conscience heavy with the plight of 'Ridge' and the trees of God's Valley. Tom Hood, my daughter Cedar and I packed up food and gear and headed south for God's Valley. This was serious and we knew it. We talked of the priority to bring 'Ridge' down to safety.

Arriving on the site, we saw that 50 or so people had already gathered. We had all arrived to discover that Matthew 'Ridge' Hill had fallen to the forest floor at around 2 a.m. after 48 grueling hours up in the trees. He was in critical condition at Emanuel Hospital in Portland with a broken pelvis, collarbone and shoulder, a collapsed lung and brain hemorrhage. It was beyond belief --- how could this have happened? It was so shocking after two days of emotional buildup up that when I saw Clatsop County Sheriff John Raichl and his deputies the words that came to my soul must have resonated across God's Valley. My daughter Cedar stood by my side and I am sad to say that I was so angry that I frightened her. It was as if I could feel 'Ridge' fall. I couldn't bear the pain --- and they were responsible.

This never should have happened. He should have been given a safety harness and netting should have been set up to catch him. He was committed to his convictions and after so many hours under such conditions it seemed obvious that he had entered a state of medical emergency. Our Clatsop County Sheriff Raichl is responsible for what happened to this young man. I believe Raichl and the ODF should be held accountable and liable for what has happened, and hopefully justice will prevail.

*The American Peace Test' by Debora Seymour, NCTE, April & May 1988.



ROXANA VILLA

We gathered as a collective group of about 75 strong, sharing the pain of Matthew 'Ridge' Hill, sharing the grief of losing our forest elders that he was so badly hurt attempting to save, sharing the tragedy of planetary destruction for the sake of economic greed and arrogance. Together we walked up the steep road to the Acey Line cut (by 'Christian Futures'), stopping twice to share in solidarity the plan for nonviolent civil disobedience. In the beginning only a few had committed themselves to crossing the line but the collective consciousness grew as we climbed the gravel road covering the forest floor. On our last stop before the line, bread was broken for a makeshift last meal. Cedar's turtle blanket served as a table with Home Spirit Bread, seaweed, rice crackers, sliced apples, dried nectarines, a few nuts and water. The committed nibbled quietly together as statements were made as to the wisdom and strategy for the action before them. Sixteen people stood firm that this was their only means of change; it was almost as if the survival of all was on the line.

I walked up toward the line with Cedar and her young friend Eva. County sheriffs and state police formed a solid line wearing bulletproof vests. Drums began to beat behind us as 75 'tree hugging dirt worshippers' roared in solidarity. 16 men and women locked arms and crossed the line for the trees, for Matthew 'Ridge' Hill; for all! They were then thrown to the ground by police and sheriffs in a huddle of locked arms until forced face-down on the forest floor and handcuffed behind their backs. The line of support that stayed behind roared with shouts of "SHAME ON YOU! SHAME ON YOU! SHAME ON YOU!" The iron-faced line of force stood stone cold, separating us as each prisoner was dragged to a circle before being loaded into a van.

One by one they were loaded as we cheered in solidarity to stand behind and witness their mass action of nonviolent civil disobedience. When the van was loaded with all 16 they were able to shift their weight in unison enough to rock it back and forth. We shouted in appreciation, peering past the police and sheriffs who stood in line in front of us. I held Cedar and Eva tight as we sat on the ground in the very front of our line, and they witnessed it all. Both girls were afraid Eva's dad or I might cross the line but also joined the group's voice in cheers and chants.

It is my conviction that Cedar's future well-being is rooted in her consciousness of witnessing this action while being held tightly in her mother's arms. She will stand strong with the trees throughout her life. I know this as only a mother can and knowing this I am grateful.

Not all that was said that day was in good grace. I felt some voices young and angry, lacking experience. I recall thinking of myself as a young elder and wondering where were the Tree Musketeers of old. Many of these folks needed more support and guidance from those with experience in the graces of nonviolent civil disobedience. I recalled in memory gray haired older women locking arms with me and crossing the line with a thousand others at the Nevada nuclear test site many years ago. I am still wondering where have all the elder activists gone?

Near the end of our action a young woman asked if it were not possible for both sides to reach out toward one another. We all put forward a hand, looking for some kind of resolve. I felt that same desire in some of the faces in front of me, as stone cold as they seemed, and could almost believe that calm passion might prevail over arrogance someday. It was hard to turn around and walk away from what came down that day, and two weeks later as I am writing this story I can't help but still feel how 'Ridge' felt when he landed at the base of the tree he held to after 48 hours, 80 feet up in the forest air.

A call came into the Community Store on the following Monday. The 16 people arrested at the Acey Line and the three women taken into custody three days earlier would all be arraigned at 4:30 p.m. in the Clatsop County Courthouse. I praise KMUN for having kept us informed once again. Many people showed in court to give support.

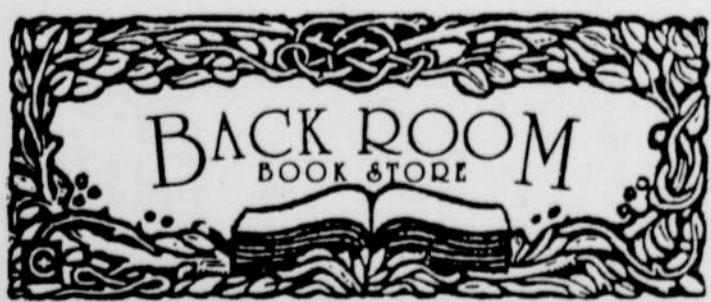
It was difficult to watch the long line of dirt worshippers clank into the courtroom in shackles. The feelings of injustice prevailed as the corrections release officer (I want to call her the coldhearted unhappy painted lady) ran a hard line against this group of forest activists, her long red painted fingernails tapping on the desk as she expressed that she was tired of processing all the Jane & John Does that day. Her final words to the court were in objection to releasing the three Jane Does even though it was obvious by running their fingerprints they had no previous 'criminal' records. This meant a possibility of 36 hours before they could be released. The courtroom hissed under breath after this obvious abuse of power. I believe Carol Newman's final words to her and the energy she received from all as she turned to face the courtroom guests broke her spirit of arrogance momentarily because in the end all the prisoners were released.

In the last of this writing I can express that I am in true regard for all that has come down from my experiences in God's Valley. To all those who have said that the action taken by Matthew 'Ridge' Hill (aka Michael Scarpitti) and the 19 arrested along with him --- he is a prisoner in the hospital --- were foolish, it seems to me that it is past time for you to get down with the elements and get naked with the trees. It is high time you too stood out on the limb and experienced true humility. I say you have forgotten your Mother and she calls to you to remember the womb that nurtures you. Remember!

Let us stand behind the people who continue to sit in the trees, even as the cold autumn nights turn into blustery cold winter storms. It could not be a pleasant experience to be 75 to 150 in the air on a platform under these conditions. May the story of Julia 'Luna' Butterfly, the woman who spent two years of her young life living this way to save the last of our ancient forests, help us to understand the wisdom of our one-legged elders and our own foolishness attempting to destroy them. May this kind of tree hugging dirt worshipping foolishness prevail.

Please let us not forget that God's Valley elders will continue to fall and the risk of losing all the other Big Trees in this country continues. We must not let the injustice and degradation to our local and global environment continue.

Debora Seymour is a longtime Clatsop County peace activist and organic gardener who spends her time exploring the concepts of direct action bioregional sustainability. She is raising her 8 year old daughter Cedar as a single mother and says that "all contributions toward that effort" by the North Coast community "are appreciated...from violin to piano, swimming lessons to literature that support a Waldorf Educational Foundation, may the gifts of Cedar's potential unfold from your own graces."



325-9722 • 1052 COMMERCIAL • ASTORIA 97103

Specializing in Forest Inventory & Reforestation

PHILLIP KEIM Forestry Technician



Keim's Forestry Services

Office (503) 325-2690 • Cell (503) 338-9691
1505 Irving Avenue • Astoria, Oregon 97103-3721

StraightUp Gallery

Opening receptions every First Friday

Currently seeking artists and musicians of all genres for performance and installations.

straightup@mac.com www.straightup.tv
1213 Franklin Ave Astoria, OR (503) 338-7318

TONY'S TAVERN

1313 MARINE DR., ASTORIA
(503) 325-5069

Downtown COFFEE SHOP

DEBBIE THOMSEN
332 10TH • ASTORIA, OREGON 97103
MON-FRI 8AM-4PM
(503) 325-4950