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2003

Interview with Julia Butterfly Hill

By Bob Banner

Julia Butterfly Hill brought international attention to the plight of the world's last remaining ancient forests when she climbed 180 feet up into the branches of a 1,000 year-old Redwood tree and refused to come down. Her historic protest to the environmental destruction caused by the clear-cutting of ancient redwoods culminated after 738 days with a negotiated agreement that provided permanent protection for the tree known as Luna and a buffer-zone around it.

*Julia Butterfly Hill is a writer, poet, and an activist. She is the author of the national best seller, *The Legacy of Luna*, and the co-author of, *One Makes The Difference*, both published by Harper San Francisco.*

In 1999, Julia founded the non-profit organization, Circle of Life, to promote the sustainability, restoration, and preservation of life. She speaks regularly on university campuses, has addressed the UN, lobbied Congress, and has continued to stand on the front lines of environmental and social justice issues all over the world. Her courage, conviction, and profound clarity in articulating a message of hope, empowerment, love, and respect for all life, has inspired millions of people worldwide.

For more information on Julia or Circle Life, visit www.circleoflife.org

Tell us briefly about We the Planet Tour. What do you wish to accomplish? And what is the basic message motivating you to do these tours at this time?

Interview

Julia Butterfly Hill

We The Planet was born in part from my asking the question, "Why is everything that is GOOD for our bodies, communities, world, and planet, called the 'alternative'?"

I realized a big reason is that what is perceived as "COOL" is a main driving factor in the decision-making process of our media-driven culture, and that currently much of what is considered cool is very destructive. For example, SUV's that contribute to global warming and waste incredible amounts of fuel are considered cool, while hybrids and biodiesels like our tour bus are considered hippy or the radical extreme. Name-brand clothing made with sweatshop and child labor is cool, while thrift store shopping and hemp and organic cotton clothing is marginalized and made fun of. Pre-packaged, pesticide- and herbicide-filled, colour and preservative-added junk food is mainstream, while organic and bulk food is once again a "hippy" choice.

This is the power of the media and celebrities in our culture. I majored in business in college, and what I realized was happening is that marketing and branding is now its own language, and unfortunately everything that is good and hopeful about our world is being lost in the translation. I decided we needed to tap into that culture and speak this new language by using celebrity power. I also recognized that a lot of what is being messaged right now is about what is wrong in our world. We The Planet highlights and implements the solutions.

During your talk at SolFest in Hopland (Northern California) you said that your tour will be the festival for people who don't go to the annual Earth Day celebrations. Can you comment on this?

Actually, I said the festival we put on in Golden Gate Park on April 20th was a festival that I designed to attract people to come who are usually the ones who make fun of Earth Day celebrations, and it worked! This was not to the exclusion of everyone else, though. With the festival and the tour, we are creating something that reaches beyond what I call the "cliques of consciousness" and instead really invites all people to come together. One of the ways we do that is by including a diverse line-up of presenters and musicians. For example, for our festival we had music crossing the boundaries of genre, era, and culture, including De La Soul, Cake, Bonnie Raitt, Concrete Blonde, The Coup, Alanis Morissette, Joan Baez, and Tracy Chapman. On tour we have various perspectives, ages, beliefs, and cultures represented as well.

Interview

Julia Butterfly Hill

We have been really excited by the success of this mission. By focusing on solutions, leveraging celebrity power, and including diverse speakers and artists, we have had really positive feedback from people who came to see some celebrity and left thinking about new things without feeling preached at, made fun of, or marginalized.

When you told the audience that day that you could not locate a US business that could provide you with the stainless steel eating and drink containers, can you tell our readers about this, since many of us realize there is no market for a practical and eco-friendly way to eat simply, without all the eco-destructive packaging that goes with eating out, either at restaurants or take-out joints.

I see all the disposables in our society as a magnifying glass to what I call our "disposability consciousness." We literally have a consciousness that is throwing life away. We consume approximately 14 generations of the

Earth's resources in one single generation, and most of that, we throw away (World Watch Institute). I always ask the question then, "Where is AWAY?" It is the poorer communities, traditionally communities of colour and rural areas, where our so-called "waste" ends up in waste incinerators and land fills. I saw a great sign once that said, "It is only called 'waste' if you are not using it properly!"

So I decided to create a kit that helps with our over-busy lives in reducing our negative impact on the Earth and its people. It is a stainless steel container with a lid that acts as a plate. It does not have aluminium or plastic in it (plastic containers leach toxins into liquid or solid food when they are hot or have oil in them). The kit comes with a stainless steel fork, knife, and spoon and a hemp napkin inside. These can be used for picnics, to store food, to take food to festivals, to eat at a deli or cafe, and to take home leftovers from restaurants. We also sell stainless steel mugs for liquids. To give you an idea of how powerful these choices are, here are a few facts and figures. If you reuse your own mug 1,000 times (which most people would do in three to four months if they use it for all beverages) you will REDUCE (including with washing) your own energy use in that choice by 98%, water pollution by 99%, greenhouse gases by 29%, and solid waste by 86%! And that is just some of the myriad of positive results from this one seemingly simple choice.

Interview

Julia Butterfly Hill

We encourage people to use kits and mugs whether they get them from us or not. They can go to our website at <http://www.circleoflife.org> for free tips on how to make their own or to purchase kits from us. 100% of the proceeds go to support the work of our non-profit.

Also, on that day, it was indeed delightful to see you parading your new product on stage evoking/imitating/mockng a typical TV commercial. Do you think the green business movement will ever get big enough to warrant TV ad commercials, or do you think such traditional market strategies are inimical to green businesses? Or do you think an alternative marketing strategy will evolve with such green products?

I believe in a "solution" marketing strategy, not an "alternative" marketing strategy. This strategy must develop better outreach to people of influence to harness that power for positive change. People For The Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has done a great job of this. Furthermore, we are going to have step up our personal level of responsibility and integrity if we want others also to change. For me, that is what We The Planet is all about.

During your talk at Solfest you made the declaration to turn the TV off. I'm wondering if you are aware of the numerous and vital political- and eco-justice shows and documentaries that are more and more prolific on public access throughout the country, as well as on the growing number of channels on satellite TV. Two channels that come immediately to mind are Free Speech TV (FSTV) and WorldLinkTV (originating out of San Rafael) that are creating remarkable shows educating us about what's really happening in the world, both locally and globally. Can you comment on this?

Solution media sources are important and powerful, but I cannot say enough about the importance of turning televisions off. I was raised without a television and do not have one now. I know this fact has been a large contributor to my learning to think freely and critically. It also makes us get off our behinds and get out and interact more with each other. I love communities in Europe and in Central and South America where I have been where people go out to the public square or open-air shops to communicate, learn, and discuss various issues facing their communities and the world. I know that more often than not, the final and, often time, unintended result of television is that it only serves to separate us even further. I am VERY thankful for the media like Indy Media and Free Speech TV, but I know that

Interview

Julia Butterfly Hill

those who watch the television could change their life and their world by turning it off — if not for good, at least a lot more than they currently are. Finally, I encourage people to go outside, into their communities and into their world and "tell-a-vision"!

Update:

On October 15 [a few days after the interview], **Julia Butterfly became the largest war tax resister in US history** when she diverted \$150,000 in US Federal taxes to a variety of non-profit and environmental groups instead of the bloodthirsty Pentagon. The US media wasn't interested in the story - apparently preferring Julia's speeches on recycling and green consumerism over her strong moral stance against Bush's war machine. (Read more at: <http://www.circleoflife.org/news/inthenews/000019.htm>) From her website: ***"Thousands of others before me have taken this stand. I am not avoiding paying taxes. I have thought through this very carefully, and with a clear mind and heart I am humanely re-directing my tax payments to where they belong, be-cause our current federal government refuses to do so."***

Bob Banner is publisher of HopeDance and Executive Director of HopeDance Media. Along with the People's Video Project, they are bringing alternative films, documentaries, speeches and cartoons to SLO County (hopedance.org; 544-9663, 461-0376). E-mail: banner@hopedance.org