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Moral Exemplar of Note - Julia Butterfly Hill

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NOTES: JULIA "BUTTERFLY" HILL

February 15, 2000 - Julia was being interviewed at the KKHI radio station at Humboldt State University, and I had the opportunity to listen to her being interviewed and broadcast live. After she completed her broadcast, she agreed to be interviewed by me, and it was videotaped by Steve Newman of the Video Production Center.

My impression before I started talking with Julia was that she was extremely intelligent and wise for a young woman of 26 years of age. After explaining what we are trying to do at the Institute, I asked her the following questions:

I: Julia, you are known not only nationally, but internationally, about your stand that you have taken to protect the environment by sitting at "Luna" for two years. Lets begin by asking you a question about what is the most important thing you learned from life from both your parents as you were growing up?

R: My parents, especially my father, who was an itinerant preacher, taught me to stand up for my rights especially if I believed in my heart that what I was advocating was just and fair. As an itinerant preacher, we lived in a camper, and we visited many communities in the states. I was able to observe and learn much about the human condition and the lives of people who are suffering.

I: Could you tell me if you consider yourself a religious/spiritual person?

R: Yes, I am a spiritual person. Religion means that people are searching for spirituality. They are groping to find the meaning of life, and spirituality is one way that they can get at it. By spirituality, I mean caring and seeing the connection between all living things including the earth. When we hurt the earth, we hurt ourselves. By cutting down a tree, we not only destroy everything that is living around it, but we also kill the roots and there is a disconnection between a life and tree. A tree has life, and is connected to all other living things.

I: During those two years at the tree, were you afraid (I am sure there must have been many frightening moments)?

R: I am only human, with all the emotions of a human being. I had fear and anger, disappointment. I cried, I screamed. This came about as a result of a number of different events. Not only was I initially afraid to be on the top of the tree, I made several attempts, until I finally decided I have to see this through because I wanted to bring attention to the plight of environment in this country. When I first came here after a car accident that I had, I was lost and I didn't know what I wanted to do. But, I always felt even as a young child in high school, that it was important to be concerned with the environment, and there were a group of people here on the North Coast who tried to protect the forest, and I volunteered to sit on "Luna" during this time. There were

moments when I had questions about whether I was doing the right thing. I was afraid of the security guards that were provided by Pacific Lumber Company and the lumberjacks, who harassed me in various ways, including cutting down trees around me which grazed strongly the "Luna" tree where I was. There were also various noises, including horns that kept me awake. Then, of course, the storms.

All of these were frightening moments for me, but I resolved that I had to withstand them all, that I had to conquer my fears. As time went by, and through prayer and the support of many, many people, I was able to prevail and withstand these fears so that I eventually conquered them. I was able to carry on there. I felt that I had a tremendous amount of love shown to me by people around me and I also felt love for the environment and all living things. Besides praying, I did a lot of singing, so much so that even some lumberjacks would sometimes stop and listen. In fact, I befriended some of them. That is how I conquered my fears.

I: Summarize for me why you took on this very difficult project.

R: Well, I took it on because I had to make a stand against this raping of the forest unnecessarily. The human species can survive without having to cut down ancient forests. We should be recycling, reusing, less wasteful, and while I am not against cutting down old trees, but it should be done with an ecological plan in mind so as not to destroy everything around.

I: What are your plans, what do you hope to accomplish with this message with which you have lived for two years?

R: I hope to sensitize other people to what is happening. Each person who is sensitive to what is happening can make a difference—by speaking out, by using less, by recycling, by taking on corporations who are involved in unnecessary destruction of the environment. This is my message which I am also describing in a book that is forthcoming in the middle of March.