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A Butterfly in a Tree

By Chloe Bailey

My name is Julia Butterfly Hill. While growing up as a child to a traveling minister, I had the opportunity to grow as a free spirit. Little did I know that a car accident at the age of 22 would change me forever. After healing from the accident I saw how life was precious and that I needed a purpose and a new direction. I decided to go on a roadtrip with some friends which led me to the Lost Coast in Humboldt County, California. I was a 23 year old on a spiritual quest that felt connected when I first laid eyes on the redwood forest and breathed in the crisp Fall air. I could feel that this was my calling to protect these ancient redwoods. I met Luna, a 1000 year-old giant redwood tree that lived on a ridge overlooking the redwood coast, after joining the movement to stop the cutting of redwoods. Luna and I fought Pacific Lumber to save her and others from getting chopped down. This would lead me into a life changing experience that would test me in ways I could never imagine.

Tree-sitting was a last resort after all other attempts failed. On December 9, 1997 I volunteered to live in Luna for three weeks to a month. As I climbed up her barefoot, branch by branch, I was starting to get to know who Luna was. Her tree needles were different from the bottom to the top and water trickled down her like tears. Once I got to the main platform I

took it all in. I never realized how far 200 feet was from the ground. Seeing all the clear cuts made me devastated which added more fuel to my fire. I could hear trees being cut, a sound like a scream and then silence. My living space was made up of two simple platforms. The main platform was 6x8 feet and the food and supply platform was 4x8 feet. With little space and extreme winds, I knew I had to be cautious because one wrong move and I could be dead.

After a few weeks, my strength was tested between the weather and the Pacific Lumber loggers. The weather was brutal with freezing, stormy nights with the wind continuously blowing tested me both mentally and physically. At one point I had frostbite on my toes, which later healed, but was extremely painful at the time. The loggers saw me as a tree-hugging, granola eating, hairy hippie that was slowing their job down. At one point, I sent down a picture of myself from a few months prior to show them that I was “normal” looking and not just a dirty extremist. They tried everything to get me down from Luna. I was called nasty names and they threatened that when and if I came down they would beat me up for making them work in bad weather. They would blow bugles and air horns all night long and even tried to cut off my food supply from other activists by guarding the bottom of Luna. One of the worst days was when Pacific Lumber sent a helicopter to hover over Luna causing her to sway violently. As I held on, I could feel my heart pounding. “You’d better come down,” advised a logger passing by the tree. “You coming down?” “Nope,” I answered, trying not to show how scared I was. “Staying up here, my friend.” They

yelled back at me saying, “Then you’d better get ready for a bad hair day!” As I wrapped my legs and arms around Luna, I felt scared and strong at the same time. I was ready to face my enemy and knew I wasn’t going to be destroyed during what felt like to be the world’s scariest roller-coast, but luckily the fog caused them to retreat. It took me a while to calm down and to soak in what happened. “Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!” I repeated over and over and over again once I was safe.

Months had passed and I realized that people were talking about me, good and bad. One early morning I received a phone call from a radio station screaming, “You better run! You better run! We’re cutting you out!” After my heart stopped pounding, I realized people were thinking I was a joke. On the other hand, I had other activists bring me food and supplies with the feeling of encouragement that pushed me to keep going and that let me know I was not alone. Just knowing that they hadn’t forgotten me gave me the confidence I needed. Radio stations started calling me for interviews and I became a public spokesperson. I had not expected this when I first climbed Luna, but I knew I could use it to my advantage. At the 7 month mark of living in Luna, I felt I had to take action and not just sit. I started to negotiate with Pacific Lumber for a resolution. Unfortunately, these talks eventually came to a halt. Pacific Lumber was having legal issues and I was put on hold.

I had been with Luna for over a year and was still trying to save her. Living with Luna was my normal now. Pacific Lumber had regained their license and were back to cause harm. One day they posted an eviction notice on Luna and I felt the

pressure that I needed to make a move again. The CEO of Pacific Lumber agreed to meet with me in April. After debating back and forth on ideas, we agreed that Pacific Lumber could take what they had already cut and in return we would get Luna and a 200 foot buffer of what remained around her. A deal was made, so I thought.

I found out a month and half later our deal was going through changes and getting all the loopholes covered. Lawyers and Congressmen were getting involved, I knew another round of negotiating was inevitable. My team representatives and Pacific Lumber met again to find a resolution where both parties felt that they had won. After waiting months for Pacific Lumber to sign the agreement, they kept postponing and refused to sign. I found out they were worried about what I was going to say after I left Luna. I thought to myself, “If they were worried about what I was going to say to the press, they should have protected the area as quickly as possible.” I was worried and tired of stalling activists from wanting to stage demonstrations during the negotiations. I thought to myself, “Though these would have helped spread the word, I felt that any demonstration would have been a breach of what I believed to be mutual good faith.”

Being with Luna I had learned how to hear the world, listen to my inner voice, stand up for what I believed in and not back down. I was preparing for another winter when I was shocked to hear that negotiations had resumed with new representatives. I was able to hold a press conference to speak my truth, tell my side and set some things straight. With my

side being told and the pressure from the Senator pointing out their unreasonable demands, Pacific Lumber was ready to do the right thing. On December 18, 1999 I received the news, my fight with Luna was over. The Luna Preservation Agreement was created. I was overwhelmed with emotions and cried. WE did it as a team! I felt that I was leaving my best friend, but I knew she was safe. On day 738, December 23, 1999, I descended from Luna with tears knowing that Luna would always be there for me and I would be there for her.