

The Legacy of Luna:

*The Story of a Tree, a Woman,
and the Struggle to Save the Redwoods*

REVIEWED BY MATTHEW TAYLOR

When God's Creation is in the process of being destroyed, what do you do? Julia Butterfly Hill's story of love, compassion, resistance, and persistence is a powerful testament to how one dedicated individual can change the world in the face of growing violence.

Her story begins in the middle of an ecological catastrophe: on December 31st, 1996, the rustic town of Stafford, California was buried by a mudslide, obliterating seven homes. The cause of this mudslide was Maxxam/Pacific Lumber's newfound taste for clearcutting Redwood Trees. Among countless benefits to the environment and the world, Redwood Trees absorb moisture that causes erosion. With the trees gone, the mountain crumbled.

Formerly a well-regarded, family-owned practitioner of sustainable logging, Pacific Lumber was turned into a destroyer of forests after being acquired by the Maxxam Corporation in a shady financial transaction involving junk bonds, a leveraged

buyout, and allegations of robbing the company pension fund. Maxxam's ecocidal agenda was like a flame that attracted activist moths - or shall we say butterflies - determined to protect life.

A child of Arkansas, Hill fell in love with the Redwood Forests of California, in love with trees that are thousands of years old and whose beauty can only be understood by being under them, or perhaps in them. Deeply spiritual and the daughter of a preacher, the twenty-five-year-old Hill heard a calling to come to Humboldt County and defend the trees from their death sentences.

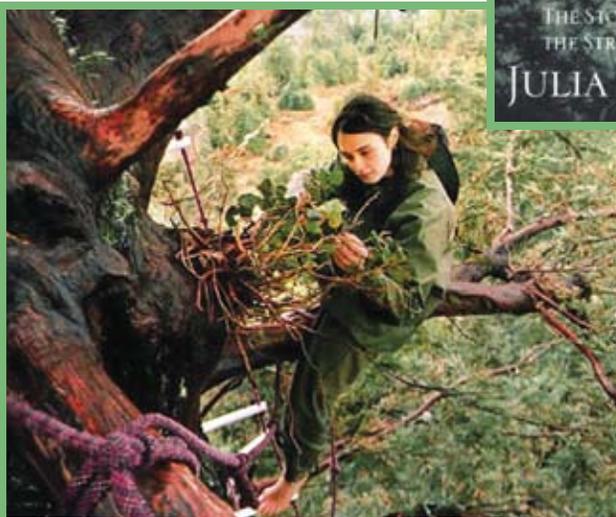
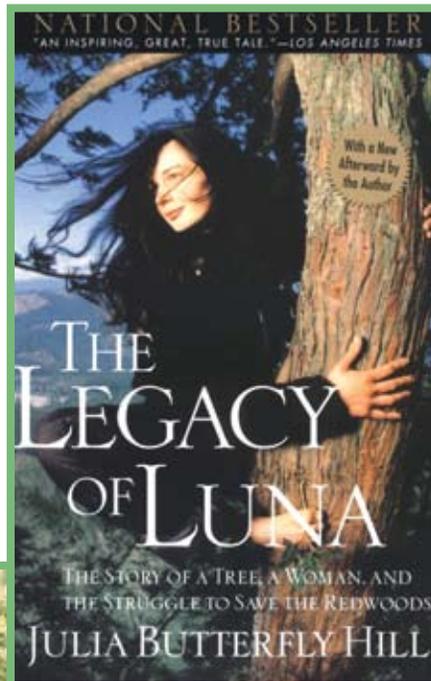
As Hill observes, "These majestic ancient places, which are the holiest of temples, housing more spirituality than any church, were being turned into clear-cuts and mud slides. I had to do something.... Since I was raised in a Christian background, driving a wedge into a tree [while cutting it down] reminds me of the crucifixion."

After arriving in Arcata, California, Hill met a group of environmental activists and eventually found her way into the last-ditch action of forest defense: tree-sitting. By building a semi-permanent residence (usually a platform high up in the branches) and living in the tree, tree-sitters put their lives on the line to protect defenseless beings who have no say in

their own destruction. Hill ended up in Luna, a particularly beautiful, majestic Redwood on the edge of a cliff, with a breathtaking yet somber view of Maxxam's wasteland.

Hill, whose codename was "Butterfly" (all tree sitters have such codenames), ended up living in Luna for two years. She was subjected to threats of physical violence and assault, helicopter fly-bys, several attempts on her life, repeated harassment, severe weather, frostbite...and she endured. She knew that few if any tree sits had ever before succeeded in saving a tree, yet she believed in herself, in Luna, and in the goodness of all people - including Maxxam's corporate executives - to do the right thing.

Although she never identifies herself as such, Hill is clearly a Gandhian Satyagrahi, a believer in the power of love and



"Through life's trials and hardships
we arise beautiful and free."

— Julia Butterfly Hill

Photo courtesy of the Circle of Life Foundation

nonviolence to persuade the heart of even the most committed oppressor. As she reveals, "I had to find it within myself to have that feeling of unconditional love not only for the Earth as a planet, but also for humanity – even for those destroying the gift of life right in front of me." Hill made every effort to soften the attitudes of Maxxam's hired intimidators, and sent photos of herself and snacks down on a rope to open dialogue and companionship with those who were being paid to try to force her out of the tree. She was able to reach many of them on a human level, and at least one became her friend and eventually quit the Maxxam Corporation.



photo by Shaun Walker/OtterMedia

Ultimately, Hill was able to dialogue and work with Pacific Lumber's top executive, John Campbell.

Hill's story also explores a personal transformation. According to Hill, "All I wanted to do was find a direction and purpose in my life."

Her time in Luna was as spiritually transformative as a caterpillar's time in a cocoon. "True transformation occurs only when we can look at ourselves squarely and face our attachments and inner demons, free from the buzz of commercial distractions and false social realities. We have to retreat into our own cocoons and come face-to-face with who we are.... When I almost died in that mother of all storms, my fear of dying died, too.... I began to live day by day, moment by moment, breath by breath, and prayer by prayer."

Hill's is a well-written, gripping tale that will leave you unable to put the book down even for a moment until you, like she, knows that her beloved Luna is safe. You will feel yourself alongside Hill shaking and swaying in Luna, at first with white knuckles and fear, and then with release and wild abandon and even laughter. The Legacy of Luna is alive today among many activists, including the Save the Oaks tree-sitters profiled on page 16 of this issue.

www.calpeacepower.org

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In the Spring of 2002, two years after her tree-sit ended, Hill returned to observe "how beautifully the entire area we protected is healing and rejuvenating! Where there was once a lot of brown, trampled Earth, there are now lush ferns and mushrooms of so many shapes, sizes and colors, and new redwood saplings.... A lot of people have focused so much just on Luna that they forget there is actually a tiny forest we saved too."

"Unfortunately, as one hikes up the mountain Luna stands on, there are massive burnt, destroyed clearcuts in every direction. Pacific Lumber continues its egregious slaughter of entire watersheds.... Going to visit Luna always reminds me that this action always has and always will be about more than just one tree and one woman. Our collective future demands that all of us become involved in shifting to a healthier, more respectful and sustainable way of living. We each have our own tree to climb. All of us, wherever we live, have a responsibility to preserve our Earth."

Like the song of an egret as it crests over a hill returning to its young, Hill's message calls out to tell us: The work is not done. There are many more creatures great and small to be saved if we are to keep precious Creation alive and thriving.

Resources:

Circle of Life Foundation: <www.circleoflifefoundation.org>
Bay Area Coalition for the Headwaters:
<www.headwaterspreserve.org>
Earth First!: <www.earthfirst.org>
Tree Sit: The Art of Resistance: a Documentary about Julia Butterfly Hill and other Humboldt County tree-sitters