



God's Valley Spruce, 1903

BY REX

Those two weeks at the end of September in 2001 were some of the finest North West, end-of-Summer days you could imagine. From the very top of the tree, a 150 foot tall giant western hemlock, I could just see the ocean—a thin strip of blue stretched along the horizon through the tops of the trees. This was a place called God's Valley on the northern Oregon coast, and we were fighting to protect this forest from the saw at a timber sale called the Acey Line Thin. The hemlock in which I had taken up residence we named Wisdom, and for half a month I had enjoyed the peaceful solitude of the dense, mossy forest from my perch so high above the forest floor. All that changed abruptly one morning before dawn when I was awoken by the loud blare of a bullhorn declaring that I had two hours to vacate the tree before the loggers would begin cutting. I told the police and other logging officials that I wasn't going anywhere and proceeded to call our friends and supporters to report that the loggers were here and were going to begin felling in a matter of hours regardless of what this could mean to our safety.

For the next couple of hours, the police repeatedly ordered me to come down. When they realized I wasn't coming down, they sent in the loggers. The saws roared to life and what seemed like very suddenly to me, the trees began falling down in great thunderous crashes. On the second morning, soon after the saws started, they were silenced and I heard from the tree tops nearby a voice yelling "Stop cutting!! I am up in this tree with no safety harness and I'm not coming down until the cutting stops!!" I recognized the voice as Tre's. I was totally surprised to hear his voice as I had assumed that nobody would be able to make it into the area being logged, and he had snuck in and free climbed a tree with no harness!

It soon became apparent that the loggers and the Oregon Department of Forestry had no regard for the safety of us in the trees as they resumed logging almost immediately after discovering Tre's presence. They literally cut every tree surrounding my platform, some of which falling within fifteen feet of me. They eventually sent a climber up the tree Tre was in and cut all the branches out from

Action

How to Hit the Ground...

under him as they threatened to cut the very branch he was clinging to. What this accomplished for them other than stranding him or how it was he was supposed to ever come down is still a mystery to me. Eventually, the climber came down, leaving Tre eighty feet above the ground with no branches below him. At night, the police had a giant flood light pointed up at me and they blared loud music all night long. I had it easy compared to Tre because I had a platform to lie on, a blanket to pull over my eyes and I even had a pair of earplugs to dull the loud music. As a result, I was able to sleep. Not so for Tre, who didn't even have a harness. For two whole days and two nights we experienced the constant harassment of the police and loggers as they continued to cut the area.

Late into the second night, I awoke to find that the forest around me was dark and quiet. For a moment, I thought that the police had left, but these hopes were dashed when I peered over the edge of the platform to see the parking lights of their vehicles on the road and I could see flashlights in the woods. The silence was broken when I suddenly heard the cops yelling up at Tre "Hey! Are you falling asleep up there? If we can't sleep, you can't sleep!" I was so angry at that moment and I remember thinking how much I just wanted them to leave him alone. Just as I was thinking that, I heard the loud snap of a branch breaking and a loud thud on the ground. I knew that he had fallen, the entire 80 feet with not a single branch to slow his descent. Before I could say anything the cops on the ground were scrambling yelling, "Oh shit!! He fell!! Call the ambulance!—is he dead?" Things were chaos with the cops running around on the ground and me trying to get information from them about Tre. Then, the ambulance came and he was gone. I didn't know what condition he was in or if he was even alive.

The mood of the police changed after that, and they became somber, almost remorseful. "Hey tree!" one cop called to me, "Let's just end this now, your friend just fell—we don't want anyone else to get hurt. Why not just come down now?" They informed me that Tre was alive and that he was "banged up badly", but that he was going to make it. I told the cops that I didn't feel comfortable repelling in the dark, but that in the morning I would most certainly come down. This reassured them and bought me some time since they then paid a bit less attention to me. I had decided that I was going to escape!

Stories

... Running

I had to act quick, the dawn was fast approaching. They had already cut the trees in the unit, and they were just waiting to catch me at that point.

The flood light was on and shining up at me, which made being sneaky challenging, but I realized that the entire back side of the tree was completely dark. I quietly coiled the entire length of line that I had, and with my heart in my throat, began the descent down the shadowed side of the tree. I was able to sneak by until I reached the last branch, about twenty feet from the ground, one of the cops happened to glance in my direction and yelled, "Climber coming down!" Two cops started running for me, and at the same moment, with a rush of adrenalin and panic, I jumped off the branch, hit the ground, and was somehow able to disconnect myself from the line, all in a matter of seconds. They were literally ten feet from me saying "Don't run!" and I turned and did exactly that—as fast as I could.

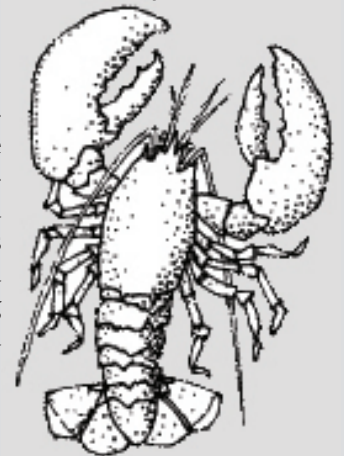
I ran for a long time before I finally collapsed on the forest floor. I had no idea where I was, but I figured if I just walked long enough in any direction I'd eventually find a road. Somehow, completely unplanned by me, I ended up at a friend of the campaign's house. Exhausted and weary, I trudged into the driveway just as our friend, Brett, came out of the house. He saw me, cast a paranoid look over his shoulder, and hurried me to the barn. "They've been looking for you all day and they have our house staked out. We've been listening to them talk on the scanner all day, they expect you to show up here," he said. He went to the house and brought out a shaver and some clean clothes. I quickly shaved my long beard, cut my hair, changed my clothes, and got in a car headed back to Portland. About a mile down the highway from the house, there was a police checkpoint. I was in the front seat and the cop pulling us over looked directly at me. "We're looking for someone," he said. My heart was beating so loud I was sure the cop would be able to hear it. The moment lasted a lifetime but eventually his gaze shifted past me, into the backseat, then he nodded and waved us through. I was back in Portland that afternoon and went to the hospital to check on Tre. He suffered many broken bones, a concussion, and a punctured lung, but he was going to be all right.



Guts to the Governors!

In 1997, Delyla Wilson gained fame after she dumped a five-gallon bucket of rotting bison innards on a panel of senior government officials responsible for the slaughter, including Marc Racicot, the Governor of Montana and Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman. News of Wilson's action was broadcast across the country and helped bring the killing of more than 1,000 buffalo to the attention of millions of Americans.

The post-Rondy action in Maine 2004 was composed of several self-organized affinity groups and a couple dozen active supporters. Participants first erected a tripod in Governor Baldacci's driveway, this was followed by an anonymous crew of righteous vandals known as the Lobster Liberation Front, who proceeded to dump a couple hundred pounds of rotting lobster guts (donated from coastal communities impacted by the proposed LNG facility). Before long a dirty horde—ripe from a week of rustic camping—swelled in over the fences and up the driveway and commenced an EF! family reunion picnic...



The lobster story is excerpted from EF!J, Mabon 2004; the full "Blood and Guts in Montana" story can be found in Beltane 1997. Contact the EF!J Collective to purchase back issues..