

The Presentation and the Petition

A Christmas Tale Abridged.

By Icel Jane Dobell

On Wednesday, December 19, at 1:30 pm, delegations and individuals will make presentations to council to ask for a pause of all logging of our municipal forests on the six mountains—Tzouhalem, Maple, Sicker, Prevost, Richards, Stoney Hill—to allow time for public consultation on the future of our forests with experts who are not largely from the industrial forestry sector but from a diverse background: ecologists, biologists, arborists, conservationists, foresters educated in public forest management, as well as experts on Eco-tourism. We urge every person in the valley who cares about the future of our public forests to



show up. Yes, we know it is the week before Christmas, but it is essential that we provide our elected officials with our show-of-hands. We are not talking about tying ourselves to trees or excavators to stop logging; we are talking about showing up at the Municipal Hall for half an hour. We are talking about taking a late lunch.

Where there is a collective will to caretake a legacy as great as six forests, there may be a way to learn from our past mistakes. In the past, up until this moment and for complex reasons, the public has had no say in decisions made about our community forests. Now, we are coming together to demand our right—it is our right. Also it is our responsibility.

To those of you who believe that, “Logging is the backbone of our community, always has been, always will be, and it’s not up for discussion,” as some say to us.

All we have to say is, “We live in a democracy. The public must decide.”

It is said that bad things happen when good people do



nothing, but the truth is, bad things happen when the rest of us who are neither good nor bad but who could do good, do nothing—even when we learn that we have a power that we did not previously know was ours.

Are you listening, every parent and grandparent out there? Because someday our children are going to hold us accountable, for good or for bad, for the state of the forests we pass on to them.

Let us be clear, for those of you who think we are talking about that bread-winner which has been the staple of our community—pause for consultation is not about whether we log or do not log our municipal forests—

It is, also, not about forestry *beyond* our valley— It is not about our neighbours on Saltspring, where logging is resuming, and the peaceful warriors are arising—

This is not about Avatar and Edward Burtynsky’s international photo exhibit that is the next wave, the next movement—in which he visually juxtaposes Beautiful British Columbia’s legendary paradise, Vancouver Island, and our logging of the first growth forests, (5% left), with the most cataclysmic ecological disasters on the

planet—

This is not about what Elders on the rest of the island will be remembered for by generations to come, here and around the world—

This is about *us* and our little valley, our local asset and the right of the public to understand what is going on behind their backs—or, to be completely up front—on the backsides of the mountains, now beginning to creep over the tops.

On the other hand, as the world continues to shrink, information to expand, people to come together, and Eco-tourists to travel to our valley and forests, can we deny our connection to the world, and thanks to Burtynsky, the *eyes* of the world watching us?

On a new and global level, who can deny that we as a species, beyond nations, tribes, borders and separation, as far as the lungs of our planet are concerned, we are all one big ball of wax?

To those who are up to speed on the quickly growing pause for consultation movement, by the time you read this, the poster and petition campaign will be underway.

You can find the electronic petition on wheredowestand.ca and physical petitions in businesses around the



valley. The names of the first businesses to sign on are listed in this Valley Voice. Others who join later will be listed in wheredowestand.ca.

We, the majority of citizens of the valley, are not going to be able to save all the lungs of the earth, neither the rainforests here, nor in the Amazon, but we have the right and power to decide over the future of six forested mountains.

We can do something profound—something that almost no other community in North America could imagine. Imagine any other place in all the world with six forested mountains *owned*—as much as any forest, land, or body of water can be said to be *owned*—by the citizens. We are blessed in a way that few in this world are. The warriors on Saltspring and the defenders of the first growth forests are up against forestry companies concerned

with profit, shareholders, the bottom line.

The only corporation we are up against is our own, of which we are the shareholders, the financiers, the deciding factor. There is no *they* or *them* out there who *we* must go up against.

They, including our municipal government, and our forestry department, are *we*.

We have the ability to save six mountains of lungs from being systematically cut down, in our own backyards, by way of old, arguably controversial, industrial forestry practices—in comparison with community practices world-wide that consider dynamic, ever-changing values: ecological, (fire, water, habitat, oxygen), economic, (Eco-tourism, sustainable longterm employment), social, (recreation, spiritual).

We have the right to direct our government and also our foresters—a committee largely made up of volunteers

serving the community.

Without making our collective values known to them, what choice do they have? Without our input, the forestry mandate is to make money. How much money do we make on logging after expenses? Is this number understood by the majority? (Not by us—and we have gone over the numbers backward and forward). Is it not time we take responsibility?

We have the power to protect the well-being of our forests in such a way that if our story—the good version, the one in which we come together to ensure the longevity of our forests—were to go out there, to the world, it is possible, in that way that community hero stories sometimes go viral—our forests could bring in funding, grants, legacies, donations, money from other places. Stranger things have happened in the defence of

nature.

If the Orcas could bring in \$167.4 million, what about the innumerable species from eagles and bears to salamanders and micro-organisms living in our rare and endangered Coastal Douglas-Fir Biogeoclimatic Zone?

When the mother Orca carried her dead baby for 17 days this past summer, the world watched, wondered, and wept. After we have cut them down, the maturing trees of the forests cannot uproot the sawed-off stumps of their progeny, to whom they are connected through roots and mycelium life-lines—They cannot uproot *themselves* to march through the clear cuts, carrying offspring until green turns to brown and drops to the ground, while the world watches, wonders and weeps. They cannot carry their brethren like the cedar coffins of the deceased in their bows. We, on our surface of things, cannot feel their roots wither, connections die and—at the risk of being accused of anthropomorphizing—cannot feel their loss—not yet—not all of us

Still, most people love the forests, and funding from sources beyond the means of our valley, after the council meeting where hundreds of people show up, is possible. In fact, if one is of the knowing that what we give to nature comes back—one way or the other—it is more than probable. Miracles happen.

Apropos of which, one afternoon, two friends, two Elders, and two women with pens to record, came together for lunch to talk about the

Petition for **PAUSE OF ALL LOGGING** of our Public Forests to allow for **PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

**This petition is not about logging or not logging,
it is about Transparency and Public Consultation**

The following businesses and community organizations serving as Signing Locations:

Businesses on this list are local and therefore willing to serve the community as petition locations. Local businesses are willing to take risks. They are the backbone of our community. When we support local businesses such as the following, they are here for us when we need them.

Chemainus:

- Tall Tree Lumber
- Beyond the Usual – Chris and Judy Istace
- La Petite Auction House

Maple Bay and Geona Bay:

- Geona Bay Café
- Maple Bay Marina
- Ship Yard Restaurant
- Bird's Eye Cove Farm
- Imaginal Mind Body Wellness

Duncan:

- Cowichan Valley Voice Magazine
- Cowichan Cycle
- David Coulson Design Ltd. 5241 Koksilah Rd
- Ten Old Books
- Lynn's Vitamin Gallery
- Duncan Garage Café and Bakery
- Community Farm Store in the Garage
- Community Farm Store on the Highway
- JS Plumbing
- Resthouse Sleep Solutions
- Soulful Memories
- Matraea Centre

Cowichan Bay:

- Pacific Industrial Marine
- True Grain Bread

SIGN THE PETITION



forests.

I am going to digress, but the meeting I am about to describe is not irrelevant in this story and cannot be told in the regular way of things of this world.

It is mid-November, the rain torrential, on a lengthening, extending, far-reaching afternoon—a portal afternoon on Stoney Hill.

The two Elders are from different tribes, connected through alliances going back generations to past Elders at whose feet they had sat and listened, and beside whom they had walked through forests, instead of classrooms, learning.

As is the way with the people of the circle who follow the sun, the moon, and the tracks of the earth weaving, winding, traveling never in a straight line, the conversation circles around the forests, the future, giving, and receiving. While waves like primordial hands drum the shore, these Elders of the story, and of the silence, weave parallel parables of where we have come from, connections we have lost—dining on huckleberries with bears, 15 or 20, who mean us no harm; remedies in the undergrowth,

bountiful, nurturing, healing; an abundance of all things necessary for our well-being—and no one says it is too late to learn from our mistakes.

One listens, head bowed, eyes closed, and then in a voice transcending words—eyes and hands uplifted conveying the scene, describes a moment—describes hunger, suffering, no reason to hope and yet every reason to have faith, and to give when almost everything has been taken and there is almost nothing more one can give—reaching into one's pocket to find one's last 25 cents to give, because—as is the tradition of the ancients of the valley—from deep within, for no reason, one is compelled to give.

In the silence between words that cast spells like filaments of webs, spreading, connecting, as if rooted in the air, all objectives, politics, phone calls, meetings, urgencies, imperatives, deadlines fall away.

“When we give something,” he says, “We get something in return.” It is a law of nature. What we call miracles—occur. To the people of the earth, the inexplicable is normal. In the understated, poetic language of those for

whom nature is the holiest of the holies, he says, “Things happen sometimes...” and leaves the words hanging. In no hurry to be heard, pausing, looking through the window, through the rain, as if peering into the future, then looking back—with the soles of his feet on the earth and on no pedestal, he says, “We don’t know why they happen”

Which brings us back to December 19th. When we hear that this is the earliest day we can present to Council, the week before Christmas, our hearts sink. We are practically in despair. We have been here before. The council chamber must be filled—how is this going to happen at the busiest time of the year? We feel that the future of the forests is contingent on whether people show up or not. On the other hand, things happen for a reason, and we don’t know why they happen. The words of the Elder, like the words of the Sufis—*Maybe it’s a blessing, maybe it’s a curse, only God* (whatever you conceive God to be) *knows*—forever sounding in the back of my mind—begin to circle together around the date, like balm, like bark healing over a cut wound.

Things happen for a reason. What if the week before Christmas is a blessing? What if the forest-gods are buying us time to get the word out? What if now there will be time to put out articles, editorials, get on radio, television, start a petition, put up posters, build a web-site, make a movie?

“What if it is snowing?” Someone says. “What if it’s hailing ice?”



What if? We let the power of collective imagination run wild.

Visions of the council meeting dance in our heads: Through sleet and snow, we see, skiers, ski doos, all terrain vehicles, four wheel drive trucks, carrying children carrying mistletoe—visions of hopeful smiling people arriving with bells ringing and voices singing into the council chambers.

What if it’s raining?

Then we see mountain bikers descending from forest trails, leaving muddy gear at the doors; hikers leaving sodden boots, marching in socks; Kayakers leaving dripping paddles; young parents, working two jobs, or three, corralling children through the door—because this is about *their* future—and with them, grandparents, leaving wheelchairs, some on canes, joining children and grandchildren—for we

are the Elders who will be remembered for the questions we asked and also for those we did not ask.

All we are asking for is Pause and Consultation.

All it requires is a show of hands.

All we are saying is, *what if?*

Beginning now, until there is a pause of all logging for public consultation—we, a committed group of citizens, experts on the forests, and non-experts, are pledged, in a peaceful, lawful, Canadian way, to do whatever it takes to inform every single person in the valley of their rights to information and to decide on the future of our public forests.

We will be signing on businesses as petition locations, gathering and putting out information, sending your questions to the municipal government, and then we will go to a whole other level.

“What if it turns out that the majority of the public don’t want to be consulted about the forests?” someone asks. To which we say, “Look at the recent campaign for council. Just about everyone ran on a platform of transparency and public consultation. The days of backroom negotiations are over. We have a new CAO who is committed to public consultation. We have met with him. We believe in him. We’re not the only ones. We have met with other senior staff replacing other staff, and we believe in them also.” Something enormous is happening in our valley. If ever there was a time and place in history when a community had the ability to come together to do something extraordinary for the greater good—as if in defiance of universal cynicism and distrust of government, the excuse for apathy—this is it.

To those of you who are new to pause for consultation, you will find more information on wheredowestand.ca.

For those who read *The Forests on the Mountains* published last month in the Valley Voice, Part One is over.

There is a time for faerie tales and love letters to the forests; Now is the time for a call to hands to rise.

Now is the time for a manifesto, a treatise, facts and figures, whatever it takes to alert people to the urgency to show up **Monday, December 19, 1:30 pm, in the North Cowichan Municipal Hall.** (Please try to get there 15 minutes early).

Part Two has just begun...