

The Advocacy of Sean Arthur Joyce: A Flicker in the Rainstorm

“It is a duty to resist evil.”
—Mohandas K. Gandhi

After a decade of writing for a living, it occurred to me it was time to give something back. Actually, given typical pay rates for writers, “writing for a living” is probably an oxymoron. Still, I realized, it’s not “all about me,” and I should be using my journalistic skills to advocate for the environment and social justice. I may not have had money to give to worthy causes, but I had certainly built up some creative capital I could use.

Although I’ve never been shy about writing letters to the editor on a wide range of issues, it was in 2003 that I heeded the call. I had been suffering from a devastated immune system already for three years and was in desperate need of spiritual rejuvenation, if—as it seemed—physical healing wasn’t likely anytime soon.

So that summer I called up my old buddy Arthur Weeks in Victoria and said, “Let’s go camping.” Art was game, so we packed up the tent and gear, threw it into his rickety but still sound ’83 Toyota wagon, and hit the road with his Shepherd-Lab mutt Amber. I hadn’t been to Long Beach near Tofino for 20 years and needed to taste the wild salt air slapping my soul awake again. I’d never been to the northernmost tip of Vancouver Island and wanted to scout the area, with a vague idea of moving there.

What I discovered was both profoundly shocking and a kind of epiphany. Long Beach had become a glorified RV park, Tofino was a jammed parking lot for bloated, gas-guzzling motorhomes, and even tiny Ucluelet harbour was clogged with expensive yachts and chic espresso bars. The northwest coast of Vancouver Island had been ‘discovered’ and a true wilderness experience there was mostly a thing of the past.

Driving north to Port Hardy was another eye-opener. Spindly second and third-growth ‘forests’ crowded up to the highway mile after mile, with forestry signs tacitly admitting the failure: “Planted in 1972. Replanted in 1980.” But it was while looking at a Haida mask in the Port Hardy museum that it hit me. The mask had been carved from a cedar trunk that must originally have been 4 feet in diameter. This island that had been thick with old-growth forest hundreds, if not thousands, of years old was now a sapling-covered shadow of its former self, thanks to modern industrial forestry.

This was hardly what we’d come for. I had been writing newspaper stories warning the public of the BC Liberal government’s new ‘Working Forest’ legislation for Western Canada Wilderness Committee, which amounted essentially to carte blanche for the forest industry to manage itself. I was considering submitting the article to the *North Island Gazette* until I picked up a copy and found on the editorial page a cartoon skewering “the whining environmentalist.” At this rate, I thought, I’d better keep a low profile, or risk being tarred and feathered by the locals. As it turned out, only three of the 40-plus ‘community’ newspapers I submitted my Working Forest

articles to in BC would publish them—all independently-owned, including the *Valley Voice* and one published by the Nu-cha-nulth First Nation. It was yet another slap in the face, testifying to the totality of industry lockdown in the corporate media.

After a night at a crowded campsite in Port Hardy, Art and I decided to find less crowded quarters, if possible. We took a detour for Port Alice and discovered the Marble River campground, a tiny oasis of old growth forest amidst an ocean of sickly-looking tree farms masquerading as forest. Luckily, the campsite was mostly deserted. By now, I was almost physically thirsting for a taste of wilderness quiet and solitude. Other than a sighting of young eagles playing above the beach at Port Hardy, the trip had so far provided little space for nature-fed contemplation. Marble River was a vision, a pocket of luminous, living green nourishing the soul. (see essay, *Rainforest Serenade*.)

Although I'd already begun to do some writing for the WCWC campaign before the trip, my experience at Marble River catalyzed the desire to continue. There have been many despair-drenched days since then as I've had cause to question that decision. The corporate/government hegemony has done a masterful job of 'divide and conquer', ensuring that environmental and social justice organizations are kept busy on a multitude of fronts. GMOs, medicare and social services cuts, resource industry deregulation, etc. etc. *ad infinitum, ad nauseum*—the list of causes is endless. And as past generals from Hannibal to Hitler have discovered, you can't fight a war on too many fronts at once and hope to win. Neither can you win fighting continually from a defensive position.

Sadly, the Left has fatally underestimated its opposition, assuming that because their motivations were suspect, they must also be stupid. Big mistake. Something like 90% of all news reports in the US now quote from Right-wing think tanks. These self-promoting old boy's clubs thus effectively dominate the political/social debate. In Canada, the CD Howe Institute and BC's own Fraser Institute are little more than front groups for industry, elite psy-ops whose job is to brainwash decision-makers into fulfilling corporate wish lists. Ignore their propaganda about "not living off the public purse." They are just as ready as NGOs to use government grants to achieve their ends.

Despite the widespread evidence of humanity's devastating impact on this lovely Earth on that camping trip, I arrived home refreshed and recharged. And more determined than ever to follow Gandhi's adage to resist evil. Of course, one must do so, as the Buddhists suggest, with no expectation of return and no attachment to the outcome. Otherwise, it might truly seem pointless. Even as corporate forces crush all opposition and plunder the planet to extinction, to stand up against hopeless odds and speak for those without voice still has meaning. A flicker in the rainstorm, reminding us that no matter how dark it is now, the universal wheel continues to turn, from light to darkness, and inevitably back again.

LINKS:

<http://www.wildernesscommittee.org/>
www.wildernesscommitteevictoria.org/