

# Treehuggers United = Invincible

**Invincible:** Too powerful to be defeated or overcome.

**Think about it:** What are you doing to and for our future?

**Volume 1: March 1, 2023**



Photo: Nature.org

*“We are at a critical point for the future of the planet. We have years, not decades, to address the interconnected crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. What we do between now and 2030 will determine whether we slow warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius – the level scientists agree will avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Fortunately, science shows that natural climate solutions can deliver up to a third of the emission reductions we need by 2030.” (The Nature Conservancy)*

## Natural Climate Solutions

**By Iona, February 19, 2023**

Why am I doing this? And who am I anyhow?

My name is Iona Conner. I have been an active and avid environmentalist in one form or another for my entire adult life.

I published a global warming newspaper for the past 15 years. Even though I was born and raised in New York, moved to New Jersey as a young bride, and have lived in Maryland and Pennsylvania, I always considered New Jersey my home. I loved being super active here both professionally and as a grassroots activist but then I fell in love

with John Conner in 1990 and moved to Columbia, Maryland where we started the 501(c)(3) nonprofit Grassroots Coalition for Environmental and Economic Justice, now terminated.

After he died on August 18, 2019, I moved back to my family in New Jersey.

I groped around diligently trying to find the best environmental group to work with and became a volunteer Ocean County Coordinator with the Old-Growth Forest Network, which seeks ancient forests all over the country and then works to protect them forever from logging.

Many hours of the COP27 event

were devoted to “nature-based solutions.” If we leave the Earth alone, it will heal. We need trees and forests much more than we need solar installations, wind turbines, and electric cars.

Admittedly, I don’t know a lot about trees or forests but I’ve been reading used books about trees and am learning. I have no idea how effective my efforts will be but I’m hoping this new effort will inspire others.

I’ve been pondering what is the best thing I can possibly do as one person to help the climate crisis.

And here it is.

# Please Join Me As I Explore a Local Woods

By Iona

As usual, I started out on my new adventure without a complete understanding of what was involved so I started ordering all the books by the founder of the Old-Growth Forest Network (Joan Maloof) plus another one recommended by a friend. The reading was captivating and I was developing a better knowledge of what to look for in an old-growth forest. I also made phone calls to local authorities and started attending meetings like the Brick Environmental Commission and the Ocean County Shade Tree Commission, soaking up as much information as I could.

I was dismayed when one of the officials told me there are no old-growth forests in Ocean County. Of course not, the entire country was clearcut long ago and only places too hard to reach survived. But there's a second category in this work – "future" old-growth forests. And even a third category called "Community Forest," which may be a microcosm of an old-growth forest in a fairly developed area, according to the Mid-Atlantic Regional Manager & Community Outreach Manager for the Old-Growth Forest Network (OGFN, [www.oldgrowthforest.net](http://www.oldgrowthforest.net)).

I've been to the closest woods that I know of about six times and taken about 100 photos. It's lovely! I'm zeroing in on some of the features found in genuine old-growth forests but this probably is not one. I just love it. There are other places I will explore in time.

I just ordered a tree identification book because there are very few trees I can actually identify and without their leaves, I'm lost. Even the evergreens are unfamiliar to me species by species. I have so much to learn.

In case you are interested, here are the books I have bought and read so far:

- *The Living Forest: A Visual Journey Into the Heart of the Woods* by Joan Maloof, photos by Robert Llewellyn;
- *Nature's Temples: The Complex World of Old-Growth Forests* by Joan Maloof (new edition at <https://bookshop.org/p/books/nature-s-temples-a-natural-history-of-old-growth-forests-revised-and-expanded-joan-ma>



loof/18548912?ean=9780691230504);

- *Teaching the Trees: Lessons from the Forest* by Joan Maloof;
- *Among the Ancients: Adventures in the Eastern Old-Growth Forests* by Joan Maloof;
- *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest* by Suzanne Simard;
- *The Hidden Life of Trees, Illustrated Edition* by Peter Wohlleben (beautiful and easy to understand); and
- *Treepedia: A Brief Compendium of Aboreal Lore* by Joan Maloof.

So, that's where I am in Forests 101. I took all these pictures along the Saw Mill Bike Trail in Brick.

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## How to Subscribe and Contribute

Dear Sister/Fellow Treehuggers,

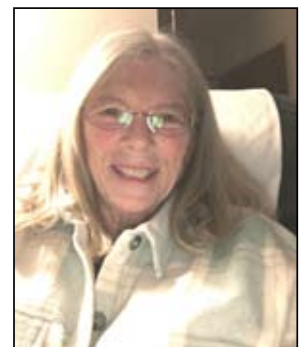
If you'd like to receive future issues of my newspaper, please email me at [grassrootscoalition@pa.net](mailto:grassrootscoalition@pa.net). Also, email me if you have good stories and photos you'd like me to consider publishing in future issues. In the past, I have published a Messages page similar to Letters to the Editor so if you'd like to share your thoughts, please do so.

I'd like to see this become a team effort as it has in the past but we need time to develop this project and figure out ways to work together.

This is a labor of love but I always appreciate donations, which you can send to: Iona Conner, 157 Chambersbridge Road 4A, Brick, NJ 08723. If you like using Zelle or PayPal, please reach my bank via [dosomething@pa.net](mailto:dosomething@pa.net). Thank you!

For the Earth and the Trees,

*Iona*

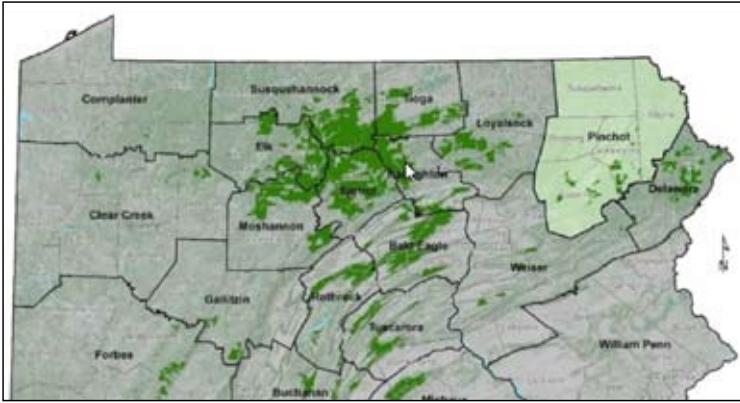


# The Wonders of the Woods in Winter



(top right) Moss. (lower right) Some sort of lichen I think. (bottom left) Seeds for future trees. On my walk today, I met a man who lives at the edge of the woods. He said he knows it like the back of his hand. He's going to teach me how to recognize more things. As much as I am thrilled with this new volunteer work, I realize that I need to learn a lot more.

# Sierra Club: Getting to Know Your Forest



Map and chart below Courtesy PA DCNR

“Bureau of Forestry Overview: 1. Comprised of over 2.2 million acres. 2. Mission: To ensure the long-term health, viability, and productivity of the Commonwealth’s forests and to conserve native, wild plants.”

By Iona

I lived in Pennsylvania for 15 years and had some familiarity with the Pennsylvania forests. I was horrified to learn how much logging went on in those forests.

Since I’m in Tree School, I learned a lot from this program by Julian Maza, Service Forester for Pinchot Forest District in northeast Pennsylvania.

When he was describing invasive species, a light-bulb went on and I put this in the chat, “Humans are an inva-

sive species.”

Anyhow, if you want to learn more about forests, whether they be old or not, whether they’re in your state or not, I recommend trying to catch part of this series featuring every state forest in Pennsylvania. This program marked the half-way portion of the series.

To learn more, please contact Sarah Corcoran, Interim Deputy Director of Programs, Sierra Club Pennsylvania Chapter, [sarah.corcoran@sierraclub.org](mailto:sarah.corcoran@sierraclub.org).



Photo: Julian Maza

Julian explained that what probably happened was that birch seeds landed on the ground, then the tree fell over, leaving a broken stump, which served as a nurse log. As the birch grew, roots began to reach for the ground. When the dead tree decomposed, the tree is left standing on “legs.” The tree in the background is likely a white oak..

- Working forest:
  - Timber harvests
  - Timber stand improvement projects
  - Deer exclosures
  - Prescribed fire
- Allocation model:
  - Creates diversity of successional stages
  - Balances age class distribution
  - Provides a sustainable yield of quality timber
  - Annual harvest allocation of roughly 160 acres
- Provides for wildlife habitat.
- Helps support Pennsylvania wood product industry.



## Timber Products and Forest Regeneration

Slide Courtesy PADCNR



## What's Really Happening on Our Public Land?

HEARTWOOD is a regional network that protects forests and supports community activism in the eastern United States through education, advocacy, and citizen empowerment. We are people helping people protect the places they love.

Heartwood was founded in 1991, when concerned citizens from several midwestern states, each defending their national forest from logging, mining, roads, and ruin, met and began to work together to protect the heartland hardwood forest.

Eastern North America was once blanketed with a majestic hardwood forest containing more than 120 species of hardwood trees. Unfortunately, much of this forest has been cleared and what remains is mostly isolated fragments of public land that nonetheless play a critical role in providing habitat for wildlife, purifying the air and water, moderating global climate change, and offering places of beauty and enjoyment. Heartwood is founded on a shared vision of forest restoration and ecological integrity.

Over time, Heartwood has grown to include an 18-state region, including Michigan, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, West Virginia, North Carolina and Virginia. From the Ozarks to the

Appalachians, the Ohio River basin and the Cumberland Plateau, the Heartwood region encompasses tremendous natural beauty and ecological diversity.

We gather twice a year to share skills, stories and songs, please take a look at the range of campaigns we address and visit our list of member groups. Your support of Heartwood supports the work of all these organizations, from our MiniGrants Program to the action alerts we share through our networks.

Heartwood strives to adhere to the principles of inclusiveness and consensus as outlined in the Jemez Principles, and has adopted these Safer Spaces protocols for all of our events.

Forest Watch is Heartwood's oldest program and remains at the core of Heartwood's work. Forest Watch is the act of keeping watch on public lands, most notably National Forest land, and to take action when forest management is having a negative impact on the health of the forest. On National Forest land, this has often meant waging legal battles against the Forest Service itself to hold the agency accountable to their own laws.

When Heartwood was founded in

1991, it was common practice for National Forests to have a mandate for commercial logging. While this is still a concern today, Heartwood has played a fundamental role in educating the public about abuses to our public lands and was a leading organization (if not the first) to publicly declare, "No commercial logging on public lands."

Heartwood has remained true to this vision and continues to fight for the protection of our public lands, which today includes monitoring forests for not only timber sales, but for prescribed burns, herbicide applications, "restoration" efforts, oil & gas drilling, biomass incineration, and mountain top removal coal mining.

### TIMBER SALES

Logging in national forests produces about 75% less yield than it did in its peak 20 years ago. This is at least partly due to active Forest Watch programs, increased public awareness and successful litigation by Heartwood, Heartwood Member groups, and colleagues nationwide.

While national forests continue to be sources of pulp and saw timber, their role is much diminished. Because

**Continued on next page**



Photo of a stream in Pinchot Forest from Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources website.

the economic costs of logging exceed revenues, logging must be taxpayer-subsidized. Logging programs have been reinvented and replaced with projects that are not promoted for the express purpose of providing boardfeet of timber. Instead the agency now buries logging as part of large, multi-year projects with many facets that may include miles of road-building, the creation and maintenance of early successional habitat for wildlife and oak regeneration, salvage sales after natural disturbances, and forest stand thinnings all of which are merely smaller-scale clearcuts. Prescribed burning and herbicide applications are regularly significant components of these projects.

### **PRESCRIBED BURNS**

Prescribed burns on public lands have gained much popularity in recent years. Whereas fire suppression used to be the norm on National Forest land (think Smokey the Bear), that norm seems now to have been replaced with ambitious goals of burning large tracts of forest. While fire is not completely without a place in the eastern hardwood forests, having been used by Indigenous Americans as a management tool in a variety of ways, the fires would have been small and unlikely to exceed 8 acres.

A typical Prescribed Burn on eastern public land currently ranges from 200-500 acres, with a recent project in Kentucky planned for thousands of acres. These large burn projects are based on the needs of Western forests and the fact that there was a policy shift in 2001 which led to an increase by 250% in the Forest Service's budget specifically for fire management. The money now acts as an incentive for the Forest Service to find reasons to burn in the eastern United States, thereby increasing their

revenue.

It should be obvious that burning forests is not carbon neutral. Burning trees adds to carbon emissions and takes away the very thing (trees) that remove carbon dioxide from the environment. The Forest Service has started to study the impact of climate change on our forests, an admittance that climate change does exist, but it neglects to see how its own policies and actions could be influencing that change.

### **HERBICIDE APPLICATIONS**

Herbicides are currently being applied to hundreds of thousands of acres annually across our National Forests. Some applications are intended to control invasive species. Other applications are intended to promote specific forestry goals. Often times, herbicides are used in forestry on public lands in order to benefit a particular species (usually oak or pine) by killing other competing species (such as hickory, gum, maple, dogwood, redbud, beech, cedar, etc.).

Another type of herbicide application is permitted for use on right of ways by electric or pipeline companies. These applications are often a mix of potent herbicides. No scientific analysis of these mixtures exists. Neither EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) nor the Forest Service have conducted any comprehensive testing of exposure risk or effects from mixed herbicides.

The Forest Service incorrectly proposes that low levels of pesticide (including herbicides) and or, pesticide residue exposures are not harmful to human health or to wildlife. This misconception is based on a limited number of dated studies that do not consider the long-term endocrine disrupting actions of pesticides and adjuvants.

There are numerous studies and scientific papers detailing direct and indirect effects on amphibians, including deformities that occur from exposure to pesticides and herbicides. Some effects may be genetically transferred up to four generations past exposure. The outmoded testing that the Forest Service relies on completely misses low-dose, endocrine system effects of these chemical cocktails.

Amphibians are biologically suited to be the aquatic equivalent of a canary in a coal mine. The abnormalities seen in frogs caused by exposure to herbicides are evident in human populations as well. However, no one can be certain the cause; our own human blood, even as newborns, holds between 100 and 300 detectable types of man-made chemical substances.

Heartwood and its affiliate groups throughout the Central hardwood region continue to challenge the unnecessary application of herbicides on public lands.

### **“RESTORATION” PROJECTS**

There are actions that are potentially harmful to water, air, and soil quality that are routinely carried out on public lands in the name of “restoration.” Timber Stand Improvement is a term used by the Forest Service that often results in an area of forest being heavily logged. Another type of “restoration” project that is controversial is that of “invasive species control.” While the unwanted presence of invasive species is often the result of man's activities, it is questionable whether spraying herbicides, cutting down trees, and burning forest land will result in a “restored” ecosystem, or more ironically, a more “natural” area.

**Source:** <https://heartwood.org>

# Meet My Neighbors: Spruce Pines (Story on nex page.)



## Continuation from previous page

By Iona

Photos on previous page and bark on this page by Iona

Holy smokes, I didn't realize how hard but also how much fun this new volunteer "job" was going to be. I mean, really, I know next to nothing about old-growth forests or trees so first I did a lot of reading, a LOT! Then I started walking and looking around in the nearby Saw Mill Bike Trail in Brick, New Jersey and taking about 100 photos (see pages 2 and 3).

One of my friends mentioned an app I put on my phone called LeafSnap. You snap a picture of a leaf, bark, flower, or fruit and it analyzes the photo and after about a minute, it tells you what it is. I totally relied on this tool to identify the three trees right by my apartment on the previous page. I took a picture of the bark of each of these three trees and they all read "Spruce Pine." I never heard of a Spruce Pine before but now I'm starting to learn about them. Is it a Spruce or is it a Pine?



I turned to Wikipedia for help.

"*Spruce Pine* may refer to: *Pinus glabra*, a tree found on the coastal plains of the southern United States, commonly known as the *Spruce pine*.

"It may also refer to the sand pine; for other uses, see *Spruce Pine* (disambiguation).

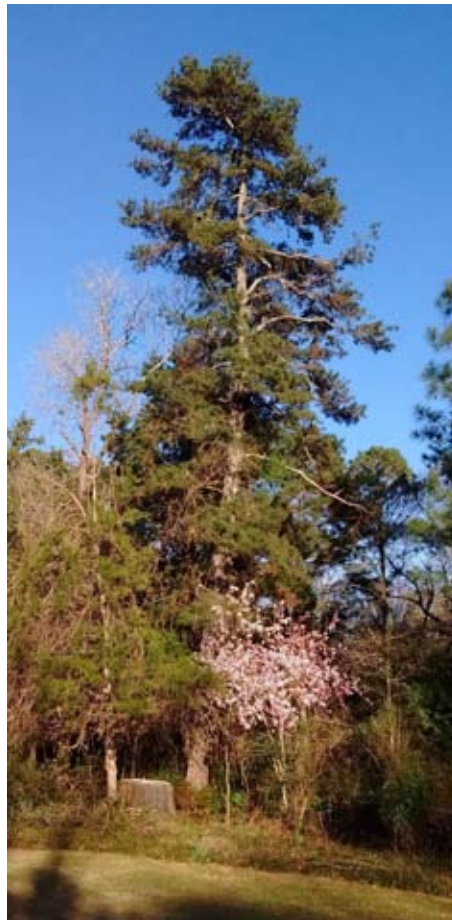


Photo: <https://en.wikipedia.org/>

| Conservation status                     |                              |               |
|---|------------------------------|---------------|
| Extinct                                 | Threatened                   | Least Concern |
| EX                                      | EW CR EN VU                  | NT LC         |
| Least Concern (IUCN 3.1) <sup>[1]</sup> |                              |               |
| Scientific classification               |                              |               |
| Kingdom:                                | Plantae                      |               |
| Clade:                                  | Tracheophytes                |               |
| Clade:                                  | Gymnosperms                  |               |
| Division:                               | Pinophyta                    |               |
| Class:                                  | Pinopsida                    |               |
| Order:                                  | Pinales                      |               |
| Family:                                 | Pinaceae                     |               |
| Genus:                                  | <i>Pinus</i>                 |               |
| Subgenus:                               | <i>P. subg. Pinus</i>        |               |
| Section:                                | <i>P. sect. Trifoliae</i>    |               |
| Subsection:                             | <i>P. subsect. Australes</i> |               |
| Species:                                | <b><i>P. glabra</i></b>      |               |

*biguation*).

"*Pinus glabra*, the spruce pine, is a tree found on the coastal plains of the southern United States, from southern South Carolina south to northern Florida and west to southern Louisiana. This pine is a straight-growing, medium-sized species, attaining heights of 20 to 40 meters (66 to 131 feet).

"The leaves are needle-like, in bundles of two, 5-to-8-centimeter-long (2.0 to 3.1 inches), slender (1-millimeter-thick (0.039 inch)), and glossy dark green. The small, slender cones are 4-to-6-centimeter-long (1.6 to 2.4 inches), with weak prickles on the scales that are soon shed.<sup>[1]</sup>

"*Pinus glabra* differs markedly from most other pines in that it does not occur in largely pure pine forests, but is typically found as scattered trees in moist woodland habitats in mixed hardwood forest. To be able to compete successfully in such habitats, it has adapted to greater shade tolerance than most other pines.<sup>[2]</sup>

### References:

1. Moore, Gerry; Kershner, Bruce; Craig Tufts; Daniel Mathews; Gil Nelson; Spellenberg, Richard; Thieret, John W.; Terry Purinton; Block, Andrew (2008). National Wildlife Federation *Field Guide to Trees of North America*. New York: Sterling. p. 70. ISBN 978-1-4027-3875-3.

2. Kral, Robert (1993). "Pinus glabra". In Flora of North America Editorial Committee (ed.). *Flora of North America North of Mexico* (FNA). Vol. 2. New York and Oxford – via eFloras.org, Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis, MO & Harvard University Herbaria, Cambridge, MA.

Here is my opportunity to invited others to send comments or corrections. Also, if you think you might like to do this work in your county, please visit <https://www.oldgrowthforest.net/> and see if they need someone where you live to help protect an old-growth forest if you can find one.

I know that others will help me when I actually find an old-growth forest so I'm not concerned about my current lack of knowledge. Don't hesitate if you think you'd like to do this sort of volunteer work, too. Go for it!



# An Invitation to Join My New TREE TEAM

By Iona

February 23, 2023

I woke up this morning with the idea of forming a Tree Team sort of like the Green Berets to swing into action when threats to trees and forests appear, but of course in a peaceful way. I just like the word “Green.” Or you might consider us a Swat Team, again that’s not exactly the feeling I’m going after but in both cases, it means ACTION! Maybe Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest is a better analogy. This is not tree-planting; this is working to save large trees and forests.

Granted, I have never been successful in stopping anything destructive to the Earth, but I’ve certainly joined hundreds of other groups’ efforts. If that’s all we do, that’s fine with me. I’ve done my share of protests in person and never been arrested, though I once wanted to be.

My idea is that those on the Tree Team can look for stories and actions we can take anywhere in the world. I will publish them here and forward pertinent emails to the others.

Here’s a story from my memoir:

I wasn’t going to put my *Wanting-to-Get-Arrested-With-Shaklee-Profits* story into my book until I spoke with Rainbow recently and she told me how that story had inspired her.

When I was starting to sell Shaklee products (safe cleaning formulas, supplements, and cosmetics) I went to a meeting my “Up-line” hosted with about a dozen other suburban housewives. She asked us to describe what we hoped to do with all the money we were going to make selling Shaklee products.

I sat and listened to the others until it was my turn. Big cars, fancier homes, ritzy vacations. Not me. I wanted to earn enough to go out West and help protect an old-growth forest with my friends who were sitting in trees and trying anything they could think of to stop loggers from devastating gigantic



Photo: [www.oldgrowthforest.net/](http://www.oldgrowthforest.net/)

*If we could have a logo, it would look like this! Let’s see if our readers can submit photos of a person (or people) hugging a tree and maybe we can vote for the best one to use somehow. I’ll probably need a graphic designer to complete this task. Any volunteers?*

**swaths of forests. I told the women I wanted to earn enough money to be able to fly out, get arrested, pay my bail and fly home again.**

**Silence.**

**I never did go out West and I’ve never been arrested but that’s what was in my heart at the time.**

**Here’s what Rainbow told me:**

*Your Shaklee story inspired me. That experience was so important to you. Your sharing it inspired me and provided me the permission I needed to up-level my activism at that time. What I heard you expressing was, “This is how strongly I feel about the environment and this is what I’m committed to doing about it.” It let me know that I wasn’t alone in my regard for our beloved Earth and Nature – that I wasn’t crazy. When did it become man against Nature? We ARE Nature – human beings ARE Nature. It’s like a primal urge inside me to defend the Earth and the Natural world.*

*Your story helped me accept this aspect of myself and realize that it’s not bad or wrong being a Nature Girl or*

*Boy. It helped me embrace and appreciate a natural aspect of my being that is routinely discredited and ridiculed by big business, capitalist government and mainstream American society.*

*Your story watered a seed of activism within me that was just beginning to sprout at that time. It’s what provided me the confidence to go set up a community Reiki tent at Occupy 2013 – using YOUR red tent, Lady!*

*Some folks have a cause they’re willing to die for; when we first met 20 years ago, I needed to meet myself where I was at and begin with willing to be arrested. Your story assured me then – as it continues inspiring me now – that it’s ok to feel that strongly committed to my values.*


*As ever, infinite love, gratitude and return to you for everything always, beautiful, beloved girlfriend!! May your dearest dreams and visions for the Earth and all Life continue to come true!*

Anyhow, if you like this Tree Team idea, please email me at [grassrootscoalition@pa.net](mailto:grassrootscoalition@pa.net). Thank you!

# For the First Time, Genetically Modified Trees Have Been Planted in a U.S. Forest

Living Carbon, a biotechnology company, hopes its seedlings can help manage climate change.

But wider use of its trees may be elusive.

By Gabriel Popkin, *excerpt* 

*The New York Times*: February 16, 2023

On Monday, in a low-lying tract of southern Georgia's pine belt, a half-

dozen workers planted row upon row of twig-like poplar trees.

These weren't just any trees, though: Some of the seedlings being nestled into the soggy soil had been genetically engineered to grow wood at turbo-charged rates while slurping up carbon dioxide from the air.

The poplars may be the first genetically modified trees planted in the

United States outside of a research trial or a commercial fruit orchard. Just as the introduction of the Flavr Savr tomato in 1994 introduced a new industry of genetically modified food crops, the tree planters on Monday hope to transform forestry. . . .

**Source:** <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/16/science/genetically-modified-trees-living-carbon.html>

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## We Need Collective Thinking Here

**Question: Is Grassroots Coalition International still a valid entity?**

*Email exchange between former Grassroots Coalition Board member Bob Maahe of Youth Skills Training Organization, Uganda and Iona.*

**Iona,**

Isn't there any way we could keep our org gceej (Grassroots Coalition for Environmental and Economic Justice, terminated January 2023). As like any network of bringing many many people and organizations for easy funds securing.

**Bob**

**Iona's reply:**

Thank you for your email and your thoughts. I just added you to my new email list. I woke up thinking we can form a Tree Team and will lay out that idea in this little newspaper.

Our website has brought me mostly a lot of spam and it's not serving a purpose so I'm going to let it die when it's time to renew it March 11th.

Now, as to your other question, I

have thought about keeping our name of Grassroots Coalition International. It comes in handy when I want to sign petitions as an organization so maybe we can still do that, but I'm not sure if that's going to help you or anyone else raise money. I'm certainly not going to be involved in fundraising but if you think that membership in this group will help you, then I think we could carry it on.

I mean, I've worked really, really hard to develop this great network of activists. So as long as there is no paperwork or fundraising, I see no reason why we can't continue being a group of friends/colleagues who are working to create a better world.

Please let me know what you think.

**Bob's reply:**

Network with no tangible products or legacy, is not sustainable.

I know there are many people, activists, supporters, etc., who would be interested in such a network, the only challenge, we are lacking young personnel in Europe, America, China, and

other continents to promote our gceej cause or the network.

Iona, even these strong environmental associations like 350.org, Climate Reality Project, Climate Lobby, etc, came up in this way but hard young energetic personnel or activists who made the outreach and got known and picked an opportunity to be considered as environmental international organizations.

I suggest, we look for such people in entire continents who are passionate to environment and we also get representatives to attend international environmental events like COPs etc.

**To our readers,**

Please email your thoughts to Iona at [grassrootscoalition@pa.net](mailto:grassrootscoalition@pa.net). If we're going to grow from now on, I'd like to know who is willing to work with us on protecting trees and forests, what are you willing to commit to, and how can you contribute to our effort?

Also, please send me your tree stories, photos, and actions for consideration. I love publishing other people's work.

**Iona**

# Revolution

## *Imagine the World YOU Want to Live In*

Submitted by C.B., Pennsylvania USA

By Surnai Ó Maoildhia, Ireland

*Parabola*: Spring 2020

There came a time when the square concrete slabs sitting heavy along the suburban streets were pried up with crowbars and the squashed soil beneath sucked in the fresh air and people kneeled down along the stretches of dark earth and said Sorry.

There came a time when all of the lightbulbs in each of the streetlights in each of the streets were unscrewed. And in the night the stars shone down unblinded.

The bricks of derelict houses were pulled from tired walls by many sets of hands and were stacked, like the building blocks of children, in wheelbarrows, to be wheeled away and used again.

Then the foundations of the lonely houses crumbled and were swept away and soil flew in on the breeze carrying dandelion seeds with it, and those many hands with soil in the curves of their fingerprints placed tiny seeds in tiny pressed hollows that grew to be oak and sycamore and birch and ash.

The black smoke that once wheezed from car exhausts and chimneys and seeped up into the sky, staining the white clouds dark, was now only in the burning of fallen branches on beaches from bonfires, and the smoke was grey, not black, and the red sparks wove within it a fiery embroidery that sparkled beneath the unveiled stars.

The trees that lived in their circles in the pavement in the cities now stretched their roots out, stretched the length of them, stretched long and lovely and intoxicatingly as all that concrete was changed to loose earth



Photo: <https://stock.adobe.com/uk/>

*“And the flowers are nourished by that same light, the flowers that were planted in the ground and in boxes and baskets and on rooftops and in the old bulbs of streetlights hanging upside down from loops of twine. The same light that’s sprinkled like sugar onto the fields and fields of daisies, fields bursting with daisies,” writes the author.*

and so the roots could uncoil and the trees could stand steady.

And in this time, this time that came, on Sunday mornings, people went to the sea and kneeled and saw the waves swell against the cliffs or lap against the stones or soak into the sand. They went to the forest and kneeled and looked at the trees shiver, shake, and lose themselves in the wind. They went to the mountains and kneeled and watched, straining their eyes to see the breaths in the earth of the mountains, the mountains that breathe so slowly in their millennial meditation that one cannot see the rise and fall.

And above this breathing, above this spiralling of roots and trickling of water in the hollows in the soil, and alongside the curling of the waves and

amidst the frolicking of the dandelion seeds, is the turning, turning, turning of bicycle wheels as people make their way through their day, to the sea or to work or play or school...

To school where children have risen from beds to kneel against rows of different beds and gently pluck out weeds and water the seedlings and the growing bulbs, and place potatoes in their patterns and name each one before they bury them...

To school where children solve puzzles with simultaneous equations and build contraptions with blueprints and nimble fingers and then discover the workings of plants, animals, atoms, space, and the rhythms of a story as they read and read and read...

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## Continuation from previous page

To school where children fill the halls with music and the foot-stomping of dancing and the pounding of running feet and the careful breathing of yoga and meditation as they learn to stretch their limbs and minds and where to stretch them so as to get the most light...

The light that fruit and vegetables have used to swell and ripen, to be gathered then in baskets on bicycles or pooled in cloth bags, and the soil is brushed off with fingers and the slugs are placed outside and the vegetables, each one a different shape, are chopped and cooked.

And the flowers are nourished by that same light, the flowers that were planted in the ground and in boxes and baskets and on rooftops and in the old bulbs of streetlights hanging upside down from loops of twine. The same light that's sprinkled like sugar onto the fields and fields of daisies, fields bursting with daisies, trimmed with pink and centered by their own little suns, and if you look quickly, especially at dusk, it is only pink you see; oh, but how can you only glance? Of all the standards of beauty, there is nothing more lovely than a field full of daisies...

And in a house where all the windows are open a bumble bee has found himself trapped and a young girl sees him and gasps and she runs for a glass. And following him on tiptoe through the different rooms of the home, she finally moves the glass over him and places a book on the end and shifts the buzzing bee, buzzing, buzzing, buzz-

ing, into the garden where he swoops up into the air, pauses, buzzes, and swoops again and disappears.

And though the girl can't see – but can imagine – the bee moseys over miles of green grass, dotted with pockets of gardens and houses and trees, and the bee crisscrosses with swallows who have tuned the sounds of spring to summer with the forks of their tails. And the bee pauses on a sunflower planted in a stretch of space that was once a graveyard, and is still, but the rectangles of gravel and the squares of headstones have been swapped with shrubs and flowers and so bluebells grow from the bodies and the memories of lost ones, who are not truly lost, simply shifted, and their names are painted on pebbles that have been moved from the shore.

And all of that rubbish that dropped from all of those cluttered lives, the rubbish that could not decompose, that could not die – immortal – heaped on top of nature, smothering; and then on top of itself, piling, over and over, minute after minute, until it leaked into the cracks in the planet, filling the gaps and then overflowing until it spilled and spilled into all of the bellies of all of the whales, cleared. It was cleared.

And there came a time when the ocean released that breath it had been holding and eased down a few inches. And the wounds in the sky were allowed to heal and knit back together and dolphins could sew their threads through the clean, blue waters again.

And there came a time when the

treetops were patched up and noisy again and orangutans collected their armfuls of fruit again and all that crumbling, wilting, dying turned to growth and the world was fresh and clean, as after a spring rain.

And the poles became solid once more.

And the famine ended.

And people learned to love this nature.

Loved it wholly and completely and unconditionally. And they learned that they are not excluded, that they are nature too. And the indomitable nature within them loved the uncontrollable-ness, the insuppressible-ness, the irrepressible-ness...loved the wildness of it all, the mess and the chaos; they learned to love the life in it, the life in them, in us, the organic, circular movement of everything.

And we learned to say, Sorry.

**Surnai Ó Maoildhia was raised on Inis Mór, a small island off the west coast of Ireland, She was homeschooled there along with her siblings. Homeschooling is certainly a way to encourage creativity. Her parents ran an organic garden and housed volunteers. She is currently living in Scotland and about to begin her second semester of a Masters degree in Modern and Contemporary Literature at St. Andrews University. It's an old university in a very beautiful seaside town. [email received January 14, 2023] "Thank you so much for choosing to include my story again in your wonderful newspaper – I'm honoured and very grateful."**

**Knowing that you love the Earth changes you, activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the Earth loves you in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond.**

*~ Robin Wall Kimmerer ~*

**Source:** Grateful Living quote, February 16, 2023