



Luna

Julia Butterfly Hill

California, USA

Ever since she was a child, Julia Hill has had a deep connection to nature. Her father was a traveling minister, and she and her family would go around the country in a camper and stay at campsites. When she was a young girl, one day they were hiking through the beautiful mountains of Pennsylvania, when a butterfly landed on her finger. She stopped to admire its beauty and then continued hiking – but the butterfly stayed with her, resting on her finger. “Since then, butterflies have always come to me during times of need,” Julia says. “Sometimes in reality, and other times in visions and dreams.”

Ever since this childhood encounter Julia was gifted with a new name: Julia “Butterfly” Hill. Eventually her family settled in Arkansas, where she graduated from high school and became a restaurant manager. Her life seemed to be going great, but then, when she was 22, Julia survived a horrible car crash. That experience changed her outlook on life. “The crash woke me up to the importance of the moment,” she says. “I wanted to do whatever I could to make a positive impact on the future.”

Julia first entered the ancient redwood forests in the small community of Stafford, Washington: and she was instantly overwhelmed with the beauty and spirituality of the place. She had learned that these redwood trees were being cut down for timber by a company called the Pacific Lumber Company. “When I found out that they were being destroyed, I knew that I had to do something to try and protect them,” she said.

“Luna” was a beautiful, majestic tree that had stood high atop a steep ridge for 1,500 years and was 180 feet tall. The branches of this tree had grown in curves and twists, which was probably what saved it from the chainsaws in the first place: when the trees of the area were cut down for timber, the mills couldn’t handle such an unevenly-grown tree.

But now the famous tree was marked with blue paint, tagging it to be cut down in December 1997. And people were protesting: activists were taking turns staying in the trees, to keep the chainsaws from cutting them down. The organizers were looking for someone willing to spend more than just a couple of hours: they wanted someone to stay a full week in one of the trees. “Nobody else would volunteer,” says Julia. “So they had to pick me.”

Ever since she was a child, Julia has stood up for what she believes in. When she was attacked by a group of teenage boys in the parking lot of a fast-food restaurant, she knew she had to press charges, even though she also knew she would have to face them again, in school. This experience taught her that there is no backing down from what you believe to be right.

And Julia was convinced that cutting down these ancient trees was very wrong. “How can we cut something like this down, and not think that we’re affecting something much deeper than ourselves?” she says.

And so, on December 10, 1997, Julia began her attempt to save Luna. She and a crew of eight fellow activists hoisted provisions to the top of the tree using a pulley system. “After an hour and a half, we got the last of the provisions up. By then it was midnight. Finally, I was able to put on the harness and ascend Luna. It seemed an exhausting eternity before I reached the top,” she remembers. “When I finally got to the top, I untangled myself from the harness and

looked around for a place to collapse." Then she looked around at what would be her home for the next week—the 6-by-6-foot platform where she was to live— and she prepared her first meal on a little camping cooker.

But once she was in the tree, Julia realized that she was fighting for something much bigger than the survival of a single tree. "From up there, I was able to see everything we stand for, and everything we struggle against every single day," she says. "I could see the beautiful forests stretching out; I could see snowcapped mountains in the distance; I could even see the ocean."

Whenever she would look out at the ocean, she would also see the Pacific Lumber mill, the very factory that was planning on cutting down the tree that she was living in. Looking out at all that natural beauty, Julia made a decision. "I had to give my word to Luna, and to the forest; to myself, and to the world," she says. "I decided I wouldn't come to the ground again until I had done everything I possibly could to make the world aware, and to bring about some change."

On her little platform 180 feet above ground, the days turned into weeks, and the weeks turned into months. But Julia had given her word that she wouldn't come to the ground until the redwood trees were safe, and she intended to keep her promise. Meanwhile, all around her, the logging continued.

"There were miles upon miles of clear-cuts, as far as the eye can see," she says. "During the time I was up there more and more trees were destroyed, until eventually I was surrounded by clear-cuts." Sadly, today, only about 5 percent of the historic redwood forests remain.

While living in the tree, Julia reflected on her traumatic childhood experiences. She was used to overcoming obstacles, and she was willing to make sacrifices. Local people from environmental organizations jerry-rigged a pulley system to deliver food and water to her. In winter, to keep warm she wore two pairs of socks, two pairs of thermal pants, and wool pants, with ski pants over that. She also wore two thermal t-shirts, a sweater, two windbreakers and a raincoat. "I was getting close to being as wide as I am tall, but it worked," she says, laughing. To warm up she would prepare hot tea on her little gas stove.

Besides the cold, Julia had to deal with harassment by Pacific Lumber. For them, she was a serious problem, interfering with their ability to finish their job. So they tried various methods of getting rid of her: they posted an eviction notice at the bottom of the tree, and they even flew helicopters close to the platform where she was living, hoping that the wind from the rotor blades would blow her out of the tree. But Julia stayed put. She lived on the top of that tree for 738 days.

"This old growth forest that is being cut down won't come back," Julia says. "If we hadn't protected Luna, this world would never again have a Luna."

The clear-cuts around Luna were causing other environmental problems too. After cutting all of the trees in an area, the loggers would burn the soil using chemicals. And without the trees to hold the topsoil, rain would wash the earth downhill, causing chemical-infested mudslides. The chemicals then ended up in the streams and rivers, causing irreversible damage to the environment.

In 1999, after two years of living in the tree, an agreement was finally reached with Pacific Lumber. The lumber company agreed that Luna and all trees within a 200-foot buffer zone around it would be preserved. And they had raised \$50,000 in donations to finance research about sustainable forestry at Humboldt State University.

On December 18, 1999, Julia climbed down the tree and, for the first time in more than two years, set foot on the ground. She had become a symbol for tree lovers everywhere, and a world-famous activist. She began giving radio and television interviews, through which she educated millions of people about the fate of the redwood forests, and the dangers of deforestation. As schoolchildren around the country, moved by her story, reached out to her, she told them how they too could get involved. She was nominated as one of the most admired women in America by a famous American magazine. She traveled around the world sharing her experience, and continuing her activism for the environment. She even was invited to address the United Nations. And she wrote a book, *The Legacy of Luna*. "I really hope that people can learn from my experience," she says. "I hope they don't have to walk into a clear-cut area of a forest themselves to be motivated to do something about it."

Today, Luna is still standing tall, on its high ridge, overlooking the forests of northern California. and the small community of Stafford. The residents there call the tree “the Stafford Giant” because of its majestic size. Its twisted branches still rustle in the wind and, thanks to Julia, they will continue to do so for many years to come.

Julia has retired from public life. But her legacy lives on through the Circle of Life organization she founded, to inspire and activate people to live in a way that honors the diversity and interdependence of all life. Their motto is "We are the ancestors of the future. What do you want your legacy to be?"

*Go look into a child's eyes, and know that the simplest sacrifices
you make today can be the greatest gift for their future.*

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Call to Action: Learn more about the forests in your area and find out what steps are being taken to protect them. Join together with other activists to educate your fellow citizens about the importance of our forests, and find ways to help sustain them! <http://www.circleoflife.org>

Stone Soup Leadership Institute
www.stonesoupleadership.org
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