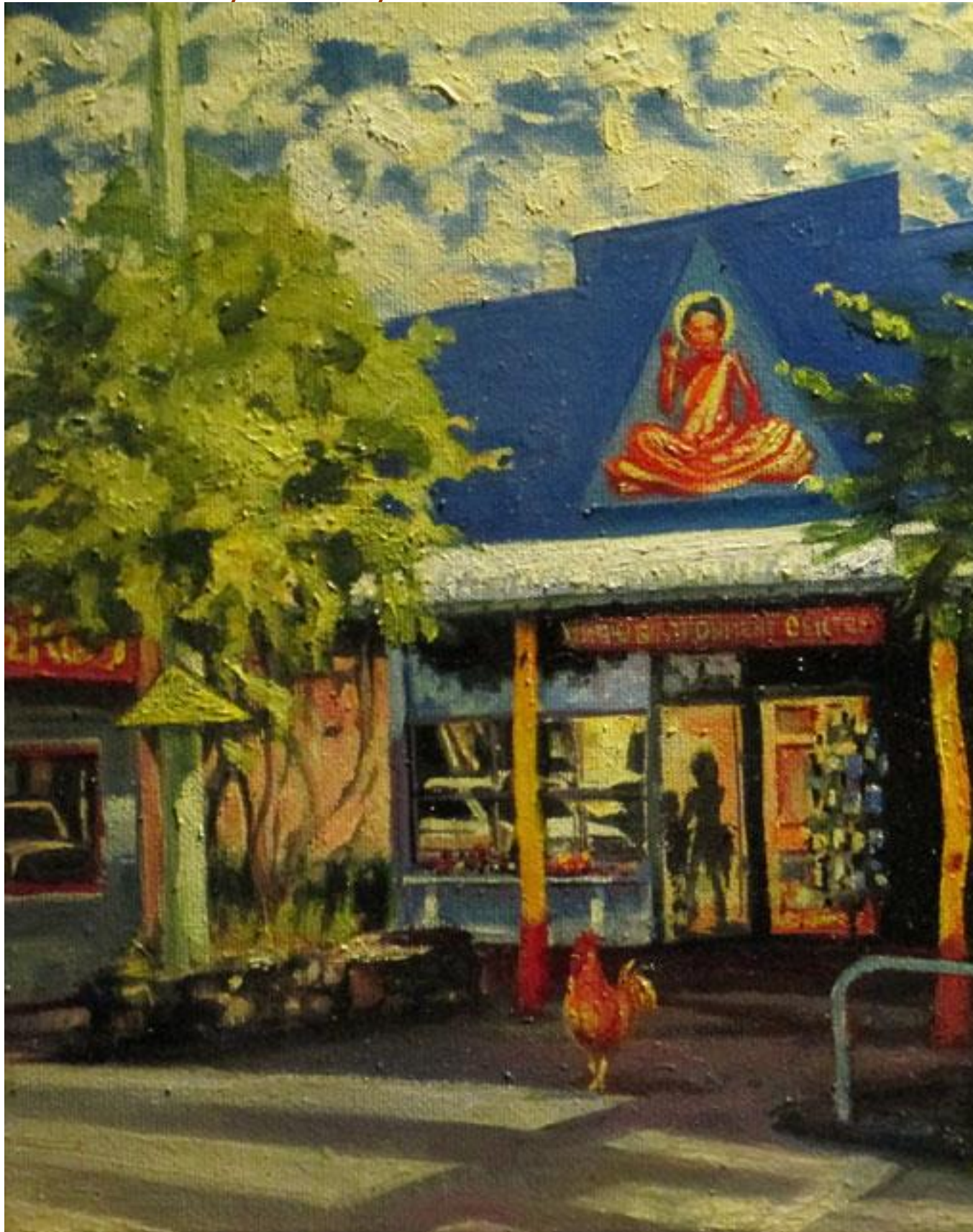


JOHN SEED INTERVIEW Interview by Steven Wyatt

I was living in London from 1969-73 and in 1972 I returned to Australia for 3 months to hold an exhibition of sculpture at the Holdsworth Gallery in Sydney and to see my parents and while there I fell in with a group in Sydney that included a woman called Carol Elliot who later became Mira who started Birth and Beyond at Nimbin. I was part of the group that delivered the first baby for Birth and Beyond in 1974.

The Birth & Beyond Story



In 2013, following a protracted legal dispute over ownership, Nimbin Community Centre took title to Birth & Beyond at 54 Cullen Street, a building with a long and varied history. Built on the main street of Nimbin around 1906 it has housed a barber's shop, a billiard room, a boot store, an auctioneer's and the local branch of the RSL. In 1973 it was purchased for \$500 from the RSL to serve as a hub for the Aquarius Festival. Following the festival the building was sold to six individuals for \$500 plus costs.

Since 1973 the building has continued as a community meeting place and provided a home for many organizations including Birth & Beyond, Treeworks, the Nightcap Action Group, a local Down to Earth branch, Nimbin Film Society, Rainbow Information Centre which gave birth to Nimbin News and Nimbin Neighborhood and Information Centre, Seedsavers, and Brackets & Jam folk nights. It has also provided a healing space for many health practitioners of various disciplines, and birthed successful local businesses such as Rainbow Power Company and Fashionating.

In 1990 Nimbin Apothecary, an herbal and homeopathic dispensary, was established alongside Nimbin Environment Centre. Once sharing the same room, both have long established themselves as core tenants of Birth & Beyond, growing and prospering independently as valued community services.

In 2013 Nimbin Community Centre purchased the building from four of the six post Aquarian owners for \$200,000. The remaining two owners, CoOrdination CoOperative (CoCo) and Gael Knefner, donated their shares in the building. Birth & Beyond is now in community ownership, secure for future generations, and continues to be used by a diverse range of community organizations and local healers. NCC would like to publicly acknowledge CoCo for their additional and generous financial contribution to this outcome. We would also like to thank the community member who assisted the Community Centre's acquisition with an interest free loan.

**Mira introduced me to Blue Meanie
Mushrooms that were growing in Ourimbah.
We used to go there on weekends and it was
the mushrooms that helped me to realise that I
was coming back to Australia to live whereas**

before that I was sure I was never going to do that.

So in 1973 I travelled overland back to Australia with my then partner Greta and we did a month of meditation with Llama Yeshe and Llama Zopa Rinpoche (Tibetan Buddhist scholar and meditator) in Nepal and a couple of retreats with Goenka in Southern India (vipassa or insight meditation).

By the time we got back we were sure we wanted to find or start a community where we could live and practice meditation for the rest of our lives and organise meditation retreats.

So we got back to Sydney and Carol Elliot said a farmer up in Nimbin has given us a house for free, why don't you come up and live with us.

Never having heard of Nimbin, because we were on the road during the Aquarius Festival, and this was around August 1973 (Aquarius was in May).

Carol said just go up to the Rainbow Café in Nimbin. We thought that it was a strange name for a café, not knowing anything about Nimbin, so we drove into town and saw all the paintings (on shopfronts and through the walls

in the street), went to the Rainbow Café and there was a group of people having dinner I think on this long table and a little time after I realised that everybody who was still there after Aquarius, were sitting around that table. Everyone else who'd come to the festival had gone off to earn some money in order to be able to buy shares in what would later become Coordination Cooperative Limited (117 Upper Tuntable Falls Road) and Tuntable Falls Community.

We lived in Crofton Road, Nimbin with Carol and her new partner Norman. They became Mira and Tunsen as Osho Sanyassins later on. They were acupuncturer's and healers and started the Nimbin Healing Centre at the building across from the Tomato Sauce building in Nimbin. We started Birth and Beyond and started delivering babies and the sixth delivery was my son, Bodhi.

We lived at Tuntable Falls briefly but it was too wild west for us and we decided to start our own community with Buddhism as the foundation.

In 1974 I went to visit my parents and I came upon the only Buddhist meditation happening in Australia, as far as I know, and it had a

European (English or Australian) in Thai robes called Prahcandi Palo. He had a meditation centre down on Dixon Street, Sydney for the Chinese Buddhists. I asked him if he'd come up to Nimbin if I organised some meditation retreats and he said yes. This was just before Dharmananda and they were held on Kirkland Road (just outside of Nimbin town) on a property called Kirkland Road.

Then Dudley Leggett and Carol Leggett offered us some land at the top of Dharmananda to build a meditation centre and so in 1975 we started building the centre and in 1976/77 we started retreats in the new meditation centre and they were led by Lumpi but when he took his robes off he became Christopher Titmus again. (Britain's senior [Dharma](#) teacher. He offers retreats on ethics, insight meditation ([vipassana](#)) and wisdom.)

The retreats were wildly popular at the time. I think we had 5 retreats each 10 days long and out of those 5 retreats we found 20 people who all agreed to find \$1000 and start a meditation community nearby to be caretakers of the meditation centre and to organise retreats.

And so in 1977 one of those people, Matt Nicholson, who'd come back from India and I went to India looking for more people to help as there weren't people in Nimbin interested in

doing this, so I found a group of people at one of Christopher's retreats in India.

So Matt Nicholson and the people who came in from India helped build the meditation centre and he then found the land that is now Bodhi Farm. We bought 160 acres for \$60,000.

I lived there for 4 or 5 years before I ran away. My son was born there in a caravan and was named after the farm.

Carol and Norman just got there in time. Carol had no qualifications and at one stage was confronted by the Nurses Registration Board saying we've heard that you've done 115 homebirths illegally and we could fine you \$2000 for each of those births. So that's be \$230,000 thankyou. However if you agree not to do it anymore we will let it pass. She said no. They had looked at the success we had had by that stage in dealing with Council, that led to multiple occupancies, in dealing with the forestry commission that had led to the Nightcap National Park, and various other successes and they decided not to pursue it. A few years later she was employed by the hospital in Kyogle to help train the midwives because she had a better record than they did.

She read the book, “Spiritual Midwifery” by Ina May Gaskin.

(the classic book on home birth that introduced a whole generation of women to the concept of natural childbirth. Back again are even more amazing birthing tales, including those from women who were babies in earlier editions and stories about Old Order Amish women attended by the Farm midwives.

Also new is information about the safety of techniques routinely used in hospitals during and after birth, information on postpartum depression and maternal death, and recent statistics on births managed by The Farm Midwives.

From the amazing birthing tales to care of the newborn, **Spiritual Midwifery** is still one of the best books an expectant mother could own. Includes resources for doulas, childbirth educators, birth center’s, and other organizations and alliances dedicated to improving maternity care at home and in hospitals.)

Steven Gaskin from The Farm in Tennessee which was an early hippie commune, they were delivering their own babies.

Greta and actually went over there when Bodhi was one and Greta hung out with the midwives and I worked in the soy dairy making Soymilk and Tofu.

Funding? Well it didn’t cost much to live. We were living rent free in an old farm house that the farmer thought not fit to live in. We started “Effortless Trading” where I imported incense and nonsense from India like scarves with hindu writing on them and we made massage oil and we sold it in the Channon market and others in the district. You couldn’t get the dole in those days so everyone was much more resourceful.

We started Bodhi Farm in 1977, 1979 was Terrania Creek which sort of started to suck me away. 1981 was the campaign for Mt Nardi and the Nightcap National Park, and I just remember sitting on the verandah of the house that I had illegally built on Bodhi Farm that I'd successfully defended against two demolition orders and I was listening to the CV radio listening to the minute by minute events at Mt Nardi. Eventually I just moved up to Mt Nardi.

But I was in and out of Bodhi Farm before I finally pulled the plug and moved to Lismore.

I was peripheral in Terrania Creek but by the time of Mt Nardi I had started the Rainforest Information Centre and I had this bee-in-my-bonnet to save the rainforests worldwide. It had become utterly obsessive and it had become my life. I didn't have time for growing vegetables or going to meetings at the community any longer.

So at Mt Nardi I became central to the campaign. Central to the organisation and the politics of it as anyone else.

It was completely non-violent. We had the blockade up in Newton Drive (on Mt Nardi near Nimbin) so the loggers decided we'd get

sick of it. So they went logging elsewhere while waiting for us to dissipate. And it didn't happen so they came in at 4am hoping to bust through while we were asleep.

However, we had a Kombi parked across the river in Lismore, watching the Police Station and so at 2.30am we got a call telling us there was a lot of activity. So by the time 100 police and the logging conveyer got there, there was a burning car in the middle of the road at Newton Drive and various other things awaiting them.

There was also damage to machinery and all kinds of things. I personally don't believe that you can be violent to property. You can be violent to a human being but it all depends on how you define violence.

Terrania Creek was not a victory until Mt Nardi was won. The legal inquiry – The Isaacs Inquiry – the resolve Terrania Creek said we could have a few hundred hectares of Terrania Creek but the rest of the Nightcap, including Mt Nardi, they could log the shit out of it, if they wanted to. They were hoping that that would have mollified us.

When the Isaacs Inquiry was underway it was clear to us it was being done so that everyone

would just go home So, throw a million dollar inquiry at it, and then get about business as usual.

And so The Rainforest Information Centre was a way of keeping focused whilst there wasn't a lot to do, which turned out to be a year and a half, so I started publishing a newsletter called World Rainforest Report and finding out and reporting on what was happening to rainforests worldwide and gathering allies from all over the world.

And so by the time Mt Nadi came along, I was one of the correspondents for the Earth First journal – this was a group that followed Edward Abbey's "Monkey Wrench Gang"

The Monkey Wrench Gang is a novel written by American author [Edward Abbey](#) (1927–1989), published in 1975.

Abbey's most famous work of fiction, the novel concerns the use of sabotage to protest [environmentally](#) damaging activities in the [Southwestern United States](#), and was so influential that the term "monkeywrench" has come to mean, besides [sabotage](#) and damage to machines, any sabotage, activism, law-making, or law-breaking to preserve wilderness, wild spaces and ecosystems.

In 1985, Dream Garden Press released a special 10th Anniversary edition of the book featuring illustrations by [R. Crumb](#), plus a chapter titled "Seldom Seen at Home" that had been deleted from the original edition.^[1] Crumb's illustrations were used for a limited-edition calendar based on the book.^[2] The most recent edition was released in 2006 by Harper Perennial Modern Classics.

They believed in sabotage and I became their sort of non-violent action correspondent from Australia and when they saw the successes we were having with non-violent action in

Australia, like Mt Nardi, they thought it incredible that without destroying any bulldozers or tearing up roads, we were able to have this tremendous success. So they began to include non-violent direct action in their forest actions.

So it brought the world to look at Mt Nardi. We got the Premier of NSW, Neville Wran, leading scientists around the world, Paul Erlich, to all write a letter to Wran explaining the importance of the Nightcap Rainforest.

We published all these letters in a book called “World Scientists Write to Neville Wran about Rainforests”, and that became part of our campaign. and was organised through the World Rainforest Report.

And after Wran declared the national parks, from the Border Ranges down to Barrington Tops, including the Nightcap, in 1981 or 1982, I wrote to him and said we wanted to do another publication, another edition of that booklet and asked whether he would write the forward to it, which he did. That is now in the National Library.

It was during Wran’s government that someone nominated me for an OAM which I

accepted thinking I'd be able to throw under a bulldozer one day to great affect.

The Rainforest Information Centre began working all over the world. In 1982 there was an uprising in the Solomon Islands, on the island of North New Georgia, where a community burnt down the logging town of Berora which belonged to Levers Pacific Timbers – a part of Unilever the multinational – the leader of that community a man called Joe Dudley Torsinga was having a beer with some friends in Honiara where there was the only television set in the Solomons and he was getting the Australian news and he saw protests at Mt Nardi. The community sent him to Australia to see if he could find some help to protect their rainforests because the people in Australia were clearly interested in this and he arrived there serendipitously on the night we were celebrating Wran's decision to protect the rainforests and there was a party at Bren Claridge's house on Terrania Creek Road. And suddenly there was this man, the blackest man I have ever seen, was at this party. I met him. He told me he was looking for help to protect their rain forests and I said well, as of today, I'm out of a job, so I'll come and help you.

So with the late Andy Frame from Mt Nadi whose property we camped on while doing the blockade. He was very brave because the Council was going to fine him in such a way that he would lose his property unless he ejected the blockage (participants) and he refused.

Anyhow he and I went to the Solomon Islands and were working a rainforest campaign there. From there we went to PNG.

Backtracking a bit. The Tasmanian Wilderness Society, as it was then known, run by a dole bludger called Bob Brown, were watching the blockades at Mt Nadi. They sent three of their members incognito to decide whether this kind of blockade could be considered for Tasmania.

They all got arrested along with the rest of us, went home and said, yes, we should do this in Tasmania and asked us to come down and help us to set up the blockade.

We went to Tasmania a few weeks before the blockade and organised the blockage to coincide with the run-up to the Federal Election. There were two Kombi loads of us. Doug Fergusson was there. He was from Tuntable falls and he later on went to run the

Rainforest Information Centre's work in Ecuador. This was the most far reaching in terms of the amount of rainforest protected. He single-handedly protected millions of hectares of rainforest.

We got to Hobart. The Tasmanian Wilderness Society people were totally exhausted. We went into the office, tidied the office, bought them all meals, we helped them with the campaign and then we went down to Strahan and set up the base camp.

Then we went up river. More than 3000 people came from all over the country and a two weeks out from the Federal election the Labor Party from opposition announced that if elected they would stop the dam. That's we'd been waiting for; that's why we timed the blockade for just before the elections.

At that point 1100 people fanned out to a dozen marginal electorates around the country and we went house to house, knocking on doors, asking people to vote for the ALP to save the rainforests and save the river.

Each of those electorates swung to the ALP and Bob Hawke's first words when he was elected were the dam will not be built. And

there was a famous photograph of him with Bob Brown with their arms around each other shoulders as the results of the election were announced.

As a result of that the ALP had a short, maybe two year, honeymoon with the environmental movement. One of the upshots of that was that they instructed the Australian aid organisations (ADAB) now AUSAID, the start a new funding window called NGOEI (NGO Environment Initiative) and to have \$1mm a year available to Australian NGOs to, and I quote, “to create new standards of environmental excellence in the delivery of Australia’s aid.”

Prior to that, we had started at the Rainforest Information Centre, the first internet service provider outside the government and universities outside sectors in Australia. It was called Pegasus Network or something like that.

It was started by Ian Peter who was the editor of the World Rainforest Report at that time and my main partner at the Rainforest Information Centre.

As a result of that we were writing emails to IGC - International Global Communications

network in San Francisco – and Ian and I were communication with each other via San Francisco. That was how email worked those days.

As a result we received an email from a group – forget the name - in Washington DC and they were trying to create an international campaign to reform the environmental policies of the World Bank. We joined that campaign. The person that ran that campaign for us, Carol Sherman, was Doug Fergusson's wife, and what we learned was about horrendous environmental impacts so we helped to have demonstrations in Canberra, outside the World Bank and da da dadada.

By the time after the Franklin we realised that only 15 per cent of Australia's aid budget went to multilateral institutions like the World Bank and 85 per cent was bilateral aid and there was a revolving door between the bilateral and multilateral agencies. So they had exactly the same policies. They imported them from the World Bank. So we started a campaign to reform ADABs environmental policies and we were able to successfully get all the environmental groups in Australia and all the development groups like Freedom from Hunger and Community Aid Abroad, as well as

Greenpeace and the ACF and so on, and have one big letter head that took up half the page calling for a Senate Inquiry. And it was held and it ticked off on all the criticisms that we had of AUSAID. (around 85,86)

Ausaid was then required to have an environmental impact study before developing any project, that they never had to do before, and that they also had to follow Australian environmental law, even if they were working in a country that didn't have environmental laws of their own. So it was significant.

Some of this was being funded by donations from Tuntable Falls and elsewhere from the sale of dope and some funded by grants that I was able to get, some people were giving half their dole and people were not being paid.

I had bought a house in the cheapest street in the floodplain in Lismore for \$19,000 and I rented out rooms to activists. I had very few expenses and no hobbies.

Greta and I had gone our separate ways. We were amicable. Bodhi was splitting his time between us and he travelled with me. He learned to play guitar on the way to the Cape

Tribulation blockade. We were hitching up to there.

Bodhi became a professional guitarist.

Getting back to the \$1million of funding going to NGOs. We were sure we wouldn't see any of this money that AUSAID was passing out because we had been the thorn in their sides. To our amazement, every proposal we put to them over the next two years was before I think John Howard put an end to the NGOEI funding window, they funded every proposal.

And late on, we put two and two together and we worked out that they figured we'd be so busy writing proposals and reports, and so conflicted because we wouldn't want to destroy our funding opportunities that we'd stop harassing them.

Carol Sherman got together with Lee Rhiannon, later a greens MP, but then working for Freedom from Hunger, and we launched a new NGO called Aid Watch and they continued that part of our work. This resolved some conflict and we were funded for projects in the Solomon Islands, PNG, Ecuador, Siberia. These were all activist programmes.

In the Solomons for example we realised that the communities there could resist the loggers because they had developed a new technology called the Walkabout Sawmill.

This was a portable sawmill produced by the University of Technology in Lai. This allowed them to utilise their own forestry resources and they were able to get \$450cu.m, for every tree cut down, compared to \$3cu.m which was what the loggers were offering.

We did an environmental audit of Walkabout Sawmills in the Solomons and PNG and it found, as suspected, that even the worst managed portable sawmill was an order of magnitude, less harmful than the best managed logging company.

And so armed with that we got a series of grants from NGOEI where we moved into areas before loggers moved in and with a slide projector we showed communities what logging looked like. These people had never seen logging, you know.

We offered them a small portable sawmill and training in ecological forest management, in exchange for an agreement promising that

they wouldn't sign with the loggers, who were wooing them.

In that way, more than a million hectares of Morobe Province in PNG was not logged and it was in the processing of swooping through, it was stopped dead there. They couldn't get passed that.

Unfortunately, we were just a bunch of hippies from Nimbin, and we weren't in a position to do the necessary follow-up, and the portable saw mills, of course, broke down after sometime and we were not able to keep them prepared.

Even so, I recently discovered that, for some reason or other, those forests are still intact. You know, the logging companies moved elsewhere and they haven't got back to Morobe Province.

So, for the moment that million hectares that was protected back in the mid 80s still remains intact.

The first demonstration was a demonstration to me that you are serious and that you are willing to step out into an arena that is completely unknown to you and to brave the

unknown consequences and threats that were there. So that changes everything. Regardless of whatever theoretical ideas you might have it's the practice of direct action is the key to the whole thing.

There is no way that any of those rainforests would've been saved. Its interesting. The late Jim Sommerville wrote a book "How the Rainforests were Saved", spoke about that on behalf of the larger conservation movement; you know, the Colong Committee, ACF and so on. He said there's no way that any of this could have happened without the hippies jumping in the way they did.