

## Reign of Terror

The following expose is a composite of excerpts from **Blind Spots: A Citizen's Memoir** by Jay Taber, published in July 2003 by *iUniverse* press and pulled from their catalogue in August 2003 after they received a threatening phone call from one of the people written about in the book.

A 2005 edition of [Blind Spots](#) is available in the sidebar under Bookstore. A much shorter version of this expose is located [here](#) . You can also read what some are doing about this problem [today](#) .

### REIGN OF TERROR

In his introduction to **An Essay on Liberation**, Herbert Marcuse observes that, "...what is denounced as utopian is no longer that which has no place and cannot have any place in the historical universe, but rather that which is blocked from coming about by the power of the established societies."

"Freedom," he says, "would become the environment of an organism which is no longer capable of adapting to the competitive performances required under domination, no longer capable of tolerating the aggressiveness, brutality, and ugliness of the established way of life."

### PART ONE

On September 20, 1992, CBS 60 Minutes aired a segment on the violence of the industry-backed *Wise Use Movement*, focusing on the threats, intimidation, and assaults against parents and community groups in the US who raised concerns about water and air pollution. Caught on film were movement provocateurs Chuck Cushman and Skip Richards, as well as movement propagandist Ron Arnold--all based in Washington State--and interestingly, David Macintosh, White House staff representing President Bush at a national Wise Use gathering. On behalf of President Bush, Macintosh congratulated them for the role they were playing in shaping US policy. As Mr. Macintosh put it, "This is an important movement—one that reflects the American people's desire to have sensible government." Part of the footage of *Clean Water, Clean Air* was shot in Whatcom County, Washington where I lived at the time.

In our Pacific Northwest neck of the woods, the threats in the early 1990s were coming from folks stirred up by the real estate development industry against environmental protection and Indian treaties. Several of those targeted for harassment were my friends and colleagues. Some of us were focused on protecting wells and associated aquifers; some were trying to prevent extinction of native salmon runs in the Nooksack River; some were concerned about landslides and floods exacerbated by clear-cut logging or mining above their homes; some were upset with conventional transportation improvements that ruined their communities; others were involved with guarding specific stretches of Whatcom County coastline from infrastructure destructive to near-shore fish nurseries and beach accretion. Most importantly, all of these people were committed to

planning their future, to taking some control over their lives, to fostering dialogue and participation in the making and implementation of public policy.

The greatest irony of Puget Sound politics in fall 1993, was trade and industry subversion of growth management through property-rights front groups, that with the willing assistance of local media, portrayed the conflict as local versus state control--with the hooligans standing up for home rule.

As it turned out, the growth management vanguard I came to represent was one of the first in the state to mount a wholesale challenge to the real estate interests attempting to steal our state. At the time, our objectives were limited to defensive actions.

Shortly after a meeting with these other community activists, I got a call from Martin Keeley, an organizer who had spent many years protecting a Great Blue Heron colony at Point Roberts, a remote outpost of Whatcom County located on a peninsula that jutted into the Straits of Georgia near Vancouver, British Columbia. Martin was rounding up support in advance of a county hearing to take public comments on a proposed golf course resort next to the colony.

The colony itself was located on 300 foot high bluffs that were once reserved by Salish Indians as a burial site for distinguished members of the many tribes who gathered there for the past eight thousand years to fish the sockeye salmon that followed Point Roberts Reef on their way to the Fraser River in Canada.

Legend has it that select Indians could read the face of the bluffs to tell when the salmon were coming. Another claims the fish found their way to the reef by following the trail of fresh water that trickled out of the bluffs between sedimentary layers to be carried on the tides and currents. Perhaps both are true. Modern scientists confirm that salmon imprint on the rivers, lakes and streams of their birth and somehow return to them after feeding for years at sea. I like to think that after several thousand years, the Salish were so in tune with their environment, so observant of life that surrounded them, that nuances of nature we overlook were scrutinized with care. Elders of the Lummi Nation--some of whom I had fished with at this reef twenty years earlier-- accompanied their tribal attorney to the hearing.

On the morning I arrived, it was a typically overcast, clammy, windy northwest Washington winter day that made the hot coffee in front of Martin's fireplace tough to leave. The hike through the foggy, dripping woods to the bluff, however, was worth the discomfort. As we cautiously stepped closer to the edge of these bluffs--that occasionally sloughed several ton chunks onto the beach below--we paused in awe of the spectacle before us: the 180 degree view encompassed the snow-capped Cascade and Olympic Mountains and Vancouver Island on the horizon; Boundary Bay, the San Juan and Gulf Islands nearby; and crystal clear saltwater below in which we could see loons and diving ducks pursuing juvenile fish in the shallows. I saw why this was such a special place to the Indians, who traditionally camped below the bluff near a fresh water stream and clam beds traversed by multitudes of Dungeness crabs.

By the end of April 1994, our growth management coalition incorporated as the Whatcom Environmental Council. In May, our first appearance before the Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board was held in the Bellingham Federal Courthouse, attended as well by CLUE president Steve Brisbane, a big-mouthed, born-again land developer who'd married enough money to think he could get away with violating permits and lying to authorities. Mr. Brisbane proceeded to ingratiate himself with the Growth Board by resting his large cowboy boots on the oak railing separating the courtroom gallery from the area reserved for attorneys and judges, and periodically making loud desultory remarks while the hearing was in progress.

More than once, the Board informed him that his attorney from the *Pacific Legal Foundation* (part of a network of corporate-sponsored non-profits organized to undermine civil rights, occupational health and safety, and environmental regulations), was adequately representing him, and that he would be removed if he persisted. Pacific States, Mountain States, and other Wise Use legal foundations, contributed such notable characters as James Watt, Ed Meese, and Gail Norton to the Reagan/Bush cabinets. When it suited their national agenda to undermine state resource protection laws, they occasionally represented petty criminals like Brisbane.

Once--when Brisbane came under ridicule for repeatedly bulldozing roads through other people's property to access his, illegally logging stream banks, and ignoring court orders to make restitution for destroying trails on public lands adjacent to his developments—the *Bellingham Herald* did a puff piece on him with his smiling face in front of his white picket fence at home. The accompanying article lavished praise on him as a successful businessman active in his church.

## PART TWO

As I continued my education on the *Wise Use Movement* (a nationwide industry-backed attempt to prevent discussion of and action on environmental issues), my friend Paul de Armond began making connections with regional political researchers and community organizers in other counties. As a result of our combined efforts, Whatcom Environmental Council hosted an informational panel discussion for our bewildered supporters that included Tarso Luis Ramos of the Western States Center in Portland, Oregon, Don Hopps of the Washington Association of Churches in Seattle, and Paul, whose articles on the topic were being published in Bellevue's *Eastside Week*. The more we looked, the more it became clear that what had happened in our community was not unique. Industry-backed terrorism was happening all over. It just wasn't in the news.

After a much needed camping vacation to the mountains of Okanogan County in north central Washington, I returned to Whatcom County with a new set of priorities that would take me into realms of the socio-political dimension that most people never dreamed existed.

While on our vacation, Marianne and I stopped for lunch in the picturesque logging/mining town of Republic, in the mountains of Ferry County 100 miles northwest of Spokane. By the scenery, we could as easily have been in Appalachia—except the

deeply-tanned, barefoot, raggedy-clothed children wandering in and out of neat little one story storefronts with flower boxes out front, jumping on and off the one block of boardwalk, as well as up and down the steps of their elaborately-painted resurrected school bus, were the progeny of hippies—not hillbillies. More precisely, hipnecks, as author David Helvarg defines this second generation of backwoods offspring of flower children--hybrids of crossing hippies with rednecks. Probably grow up to be loggers who smoke pot.

I liked the town and its easy going atmosphere; people standing around gabbin' in front of the post office; reading the paper on a bench in front of the hardware store; planting flowers in the front yard. As soon as we opened the screen door of the co-op café and bakery, I felt right at home. Jimi Hendrix' *Crosstown Traffic* rolling out of the kitchen on waves of homemade soup and fresh-baked bread. I was back in 1971, Fairhaven district, South Bellingham. Time stood still. I could have stayed there all day; Marianne, in her Hawaiian print shirt and Carmen Miranda beach hat, wanted to get take-out, and walk our poodle Ebony around town. I sat on the bench outside and laughed to myself as they promenaded up and down the street like they'd lived there all their lives. They stood out like, well, Miami tourists in Appalachia.

As we often do when visiting new locales, we picked up the local newspaper to get the flavor of the area. The eight-page *Republic Miner* contained the typical small town articles about weddings, civic group functions, and the Sheriff's report, along with the usual hardware, grocery, and real estate ads. What caught my eye, though, was a full-page color ad by The Umbrella Group--an unusual name for this arid side of the state--that consisted mostly of text denouncing Growth Management, environmentalists, and anyone else who allegedly was putting timber workers and miners out of work. The name rang a bell, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it.

When we tuned into the local radio station, we learned that the mill that employed most of the town was scaling back and making layoffs. The call-in show we caught in mid stride was full of scapegoating and fear-mongering by people who were obviously worried about their livelihoods. We then picked up some groceries, threw the paper in the bag, and headed out to an old Civilian Conservation Corps campground for some peace and quiet.

Marianne's Uncle Tom had helped build some of the CCC log and granite shelters at Deception Pass State Park during the Depression, and my old skipper Thorstein Sandbeck used to tell stories about the wild crew of young men he worked with on Orcas Island when they were constructing similar structures at Moran State Park. We always enjoyed checking out campgrounds where the CCC or WPA had worked. The foremen of these desperate crews were real craftsmen, and the work showed it. The full-fledged rustic CCC camp, preserved in tact and still used by scouts and schools, contained bunkhouses, a cook shed, a dining hall, outdoor showers, a mechanic/machine shop, and a woodworking building where they made knotty-pine products to sell. A wooden plaque hangs inside commemorating these hard-working fellows for their help to local ranchers in rounding up cattle and putting out brush fires. Too bad there isn't a similar program

today. These guys got a heck of an education.

As it turned out, TUG was another industry-funded lobbying group that was evading disclosure by failing to report campaign expenditures, which in turn enabled them to come in under the radar of media and good government groups that monitored election department forms to see who was funding support or opposition to candidates, initiatives, or referendums. Evidently, Initiative-164 supporters weren't content with the ample backing of the Building Industry Association and Washington Association of Realtors, and were hedging their bets with unreported donations.

The following week, I saw a notice in the Herald for a CLUE-hosted meeting of the Committee for Environmental Justice, at Meridian High School north of the town of Laurel, a not-so-wide spot in the road, where a farm implement dealer and small café seem to be the only going concerns. As I walked through the parking lot to the front doors, I noticed several of the trucks had gun racks in the rear windows that weren't sporting fishing rods. I was a little uneasy, but hunting rifles in October in Whatcom County were not unusual—I had hunted off and on myself. Besides, I figured, since Whatcom County Council member/CLUE Board member Kathy Sutter was there, and they announced the meeting in the paper, it would probably be fine.

When I entered the hall, I spotted Gene Goldsmith, the *Wise Use* State Legislator from Ferndale. I figured the meeting would probably be a little boring, full of nonsense and hyperbole--as was usually the case at property-rights meetings--but perhaps informative in terms of better comprehending their idiocy. I decided to settle in and just observe the doings.

As I looked around, I noticed several characters I hadn't spotted before at Wise Use rallies or public hearings. Some of them were wearing camouflage clothing; one who was operating a video camera, on a tri-pod between me and Representative Goldsmith, had a ball cap on with an insignia of a revolutionary war Minuteman. The average age of the attendees was about fifty--mostly men--and definitely working class.

CLUE spokesman and Building Industry Association agent Skip Richards opened the meeting by introducing the master of ceremonies from Snohomish County, who launched into a mild-mannered, monotonous diatribe on Millennialism, Armageddon, and the looming "End Times." His face and demeanor reminded me of the aristocratic head of chambers in the *Rumpole* TV series. Calm, nicely dressed in slacks, sweater and blazer, dreamy-eyed--he really believes this stuff. Several "expert" speakers continued in a similar but more excited vein over the next two hours--including a tall, pompous, white-haired candidate for the Washington Supreme Court--interrupted only by spontaneous testimonials from audience members who popped up here and there, regaling their encounters with agents from ATF (Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms). Guys with dark rings around their eyes, like the cast in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, like maybe they'd been losing a lot of sleep worrying about the UN invasion or maybe been over self-medicating.

Somebody later told me the militia/Christian Identity milieu is notorious for manufacturing and indulging in methamphetamines. High profit margin to finance their activities, and good at giving them an intense edge that caffeine can't quite provide. Oftentimes, it's when one of their labs blows up sending a ball of toxic fire a couple hundred feet high that law enforcement first gets wind of them being up to no good.

As I witnessed the escalating fervor of the many wild-eyed participants, including a visibly agitated Representative Goldsmith, whose one leg kept bouncing up and down—accelerating with the passion of the testifiers--I began to wonder how many of these marginally-sane malcontents were packing firearms under their jackets. I was considerably relieved when they announced the coffee and cookie break, and headed in to grab some refreshment and look around.

The kitchen was worse—it was full of maniacal Larouchites leaning over the tables frenziedly pitching their knowledge of the House of Windsor and Rothschild connections to internment camps run by UN troops at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport for locking up people like themselves who knew the secrets about the New World Order. There were other sociopaths nearly foaming at the mouth while frantically hawking guns, books, and armaments orders to already pumped-up militia recruits who were loading up on caffeine and sugar. Soft sell was not in their repertoire. I decided it was time to head out before someone pointed me out to this collection of misfits.

When I got home I phoned Paul for a debriefing. Marianne said I was white as a sheet and asked me if I was feeling well. Surprisingly, it took me a couple of days to unwind from the experience. Paul and I agreed not to attend these types of functions alone from then on--a decision I wouldn't regret.

### PART THREE

October 26, 1994, four days after the Laurel Grange militia revival, the *Wise Use* Whatcom County Council announced it was withholding support from a human rights group formed in the wake of a cross-burning and shotgun attack at a migrant workers' camp near Lynden. A city of five thousand with a history of anti-abortion, anti-gay, religious activism--due in part to the concentration of Christians involved with organizations like Eagle Forum, Focus on the Family, and Christian Coalition--Lynden's prosperous berry farmers relied on seasonal workers from Mexico. To some of the Wise Use bigots--particularly their associates in the militia recruiting organization Citizens for Liberty-- these non-white laborers were viewed on a par with Indians and Blacks--not only unequal in the eyes of God, but undeserving of equal protection under the law. The County Council's major objection to the human rights group, however, was its support of equal rights for homosexuals.

Unfortunately, in their determination to get this obscene body of public officials to pass a resolution in support of human rights, the crusaders that later became the Whatcom Human Rights Task Force agreed to Council demands to drop protection of homosexuals from their resolution. Meanwhile, down in Snohomish County, just north of Seattle, growth management activist Ellen Gray was threatened by property-rights zealots

brandishing a hangman's noose. Ellen was later asked to testify before a Congressional committee investigating domestic terrorism.

In January 1995, Whatcom County Council member Marlene Dawson--a real estate speculator on the Lummi Indian Reservation--urged U.S. Senator Slade Gorton to "drastically cut Lummi funding" on behalf of her and other white fee land owners. The Fee Land Owners Association (FLOA), in which Marlene was active, had been at odds with the tribe over the sovereignty of Lummi Nation to manage water resources within its own jurisdiction. To the white developers, this interfered with their ability to make easy money at the expense of the tribe.

This situation played out on numerous Indian reservations throughout the state, especially those with waterfront. Puget Sound was notorious for battles between tribes and developers. United Property Owners of Washington (UPOW) is the umbrella lobbying and litigation organization for the whites. Former U.S. Representative Jack Metcalf from Langley on Whidbey Island (whose father was a *Silver Shirt* Nazi-sympathizer during World War II) served on UPOW's board.

Official history of the Lummi Nation reveals that the three largely white settlements on the 12,000 acre reservation--Sandy Point, Sandy Point Heights, and Gooseberry Point--are the consequence of a combination of illegal squatting, devious land deals by a U.S. Indian Agent, outright theft by the U.S. Department of the Interior, as well as extortion by a U.S. Indian Health Service doctor who threatened to withhold medical treatment entitled to the Lummis by law. Senator Gorton made a name for himself in the 1970s as the Washington State Attorney General who led the fight to deprive Washington Indian tribes of their fishing rights guaranteed under the 1855 **Treaty of Point Elliot**. I remember in 1974 my Lummi and Samish friends being rammed and shot at while fishing salmon. As a U.S. Senator in 1995, Gorton took the action of threatening to deprive the Lummis of funds used to support such needs as health services for their elders and the Head Start program for their children.

After an armed stand-off on the reservation between Lummi Police and Whatcom County Sheriff's Deputies at the site of a Lummi Nation well, anti-Indian organizers stepped up their activities. Several Indian youth were harassed and assaulted in the nearby Ferndale School District, and placard-carrying contingents from FLOA, stirred up by Skip Richards' propaganda equating property-rights with civil rights, became regulars at County Council meetings.

My attention in early 1995 was divided between Growth Management, environmental protection, public health and safety on one hand--treaty rights and human dignity on the other. My commitment to safeguarding the democratic process brought them together.

#### PART FOUR

On March 16, 1995, the Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board sent a letter to Governor Lowry recommending monetary sanctions against Whatcom County for making absolutely no attempt to comply with its order of the previous November.

Sanctions available to the Governor under the Growth Management Act included withholding of transportation funds, liquor and sales tax revenues. At the time, sanctions had yet to be applied in any of Washington's 39 counties but Chelan, where Wise Use/militia county officials and the Chelan County Sheriff were completely out of control.

A short while later, at a human rights workshop I had the good fortune to meet Eric Ward from Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment in Seattle. Eric, and his partner Bill Wassmuth, were focused on constraining racist based political violence. Eric, a young, dreadlocked, black man with blue eyes had been initiated into human rights work combating neo-Nazi skinheads in Eugene, Oregon. Bill, an older, white, former Catholic priest from Idaho, had received his initiation fighting *Aryan Nations*, which is suspected of blowing off the back of his home with dynamite.

By April 1995, my commitment to public affairs had taken a large toll on my ability to make a living, and as creditors finally forced the issue, I opted to file bankruptcy. On April 19, when I made the early morning trip south to the bankruptcy court in Snohomish County--located in the city of Everett--I decided to stop in afterward and introduce myself to Ellen Gray. When we met for lunch, I related to her some of the stuff Paul was uncovering, and suggested, "We might be able to help you do something about the militia thugs down here. You know your Sheriff's mixed up with 'em." She stopped me in mid sentence, staring with a puzzled look. "You seem so calm. Do you know what happened this morning?"

I said, "No, what?"

"Someone blew up the Federal Building in Oklahoma City."

"What?"

"They leveled a three-story building with a truck bomb."

"Holy shit--this is the anniversary of Waco."

Later in May 1995, CLUE's Ben Hinckle, who'd opened for Chuck Cushman at a *Wise Use* Rome Grange revival, hosted an open-to-the-public Citizens for Liberty meeting at Squaticum Harbor Center. Citizens for Liberty--an amalgam of adherents of the John Birch Society, Liberty Lobby, and other racist /anti-Semitic organizations--was waxing as a militia recruiting group, drawing interest from less stable members of Fee Land Owners Association and other property-rights fanatics. The new political climate boastfully created by CLUE and its sponsor the Building Industry Association, had clearly signaled it was time for these dormant Minutemen to prepare for action. The targets of their delusional fear and hatred had been provided--now it was time for revenge. Whatcom County Sheriff Dale Brandland attended to warn them not to "take the law into their own hands." At a later public meeting of Citizens for Liberty, Hinckle threatened Paul with a knife.

Needless to say, I was incredulous when the Whatcom Human Rights Task Force nearly agreed to participate in a public forum with Hinckle at the Bellingham Library. It wasn't the first nor the last time they had to be dissuaded from following their inane chairman into providing a platform for bigots. As Paul astutely observed,

*There's an extraordinarily high incidence of people in the extreme Right who have suffered organic brain damage from head injuries—traumatic injury that turned them into dangerous kooks. This makes it all the more frustrating when liberals, presumably confounding free speech with unopposed speech, go out of their way to protect hate mongers. You know, they want to protect people who aren't being attacked, and they want to ignore people who are. That way they can feel virtuous without incurring any risk whatsoever.*

In July 1995, I persuaded the board of Whatcom Environmental Council that our primary obligation to the community had shifted. While we were to continue our public interest litigation together for another year, we would do so with public education and exposure of Wise Use in mind. We would be in the news on a regular basis, and this gave us a platform for beginning the process of repairing community safeguards rusty from disuse. Toward this end, we secured a table at the weekly farmer's market in downtown Bellingham, at which we displayed player's programs of the political Right in Whatcom County, complete with photos and copies of important documents. We sold videos of their gatherings for five bucks. We provided Q & A sheets and chronological flyers that explained the **Growth Management Act** and the ensuing conflict. We also mailed copies of Wise Use hate literature to radio stations, locally-owned newspapers, and mainstream religious leaders. Even if we were to lose the battles for public resource protection, we were determined to settle the hash of the criminals masquerading as responsible businessmen.

In August 1995, Whatcom Environmental Council published Paul de Armond's seminal report [Wise Use in Northern Puget Sound](#), a comprehensive sourced documentation of the property-rights rebellion choreographed and coordinated by the Building Industry Association. In this lengthy report, in which names are named, crimes exposed, and dereliction of duty denoted, a clear picture of the methods of obstruction and subversion of self-governance was conveyed. Paul's report also illustrated how the Republicans used an independent expenditure campaign to outfox the Whatcom Democrats, totally blowing them out of the water in the 1993 elections. When Democratic Party Chair Terry Bornemann saw the report, he called Paul and said, "I'm going to ruin you!"

This report signaled the beginning of the end of the property rights/militia uprising of the 1990s in Washington State. It would take six more years--largely due to the local news monopoly of the *Bellingham Herald* and its vindictive, bigoted publisher, J.C. Hickman--for Whatcom County to return to a semblance of normalcy. In the summer of 1995, though, the stealth aspect of Wise Use was up.

## PART FIVE

As Paul's report circulated around the state and nation, attracting interest from civic groups, academia, law enforcement, and news reporters in the US, Canada, and Europe, the anti-Indian element of the property-rights fundamentalists began to escalate the conflict. In September 1995, Bellingham's KGMI radio talk-show host, Jeff Kent, led Fee Land Owners Association representatives Jeff McKay and Linnea Smith in an hour-long

diatribe against the Lummis. When U.S. Senator Gorton stepped up his attack against Native sovereignty, Washington Environmental Council and the Washington Association of Churches joined the Lummis in condemning this unconscionable act of revenge for losing the fish wars in federal court as a younger man.

Tribes across the nation held demonstrations of solidarity, with large gatherings in Seattle and Washington D.C. In Whatcom County, the Lummi people assembled in front of the County Courthouse, closing off the large intersection next to the civic plaza, to dance in a large circle around a giant drum where a two-beat rhythm was pounded out by a group of half a dozen tribal singers. My friend Cha-das-ska-dum Which-ta-lum, the noted Lummi spiritual leader and proponent of Indian sovereignty throughout the Americas, added his booming voice in a prayer for the spiritual growth of the misguided white politicians. Bureaucrats and officials from all four sides of the plaza stood at their windows, the hair raising on their necks at the sound of these First Nations people singing and dancing away their collective foreboding.

For a brief period that fall, humanists and renegade Democrats worked along side attorney Joe Bowen, a Skagit Indian fielded to challenge Gorton for U.S. Senate. Perhaps in the twisted minds that comprised Citizens for Liberty, this confirmed their delusions of conspiracy against their version of white supremacy guaranteed by the “organic” U.S. Constitution, the one without amendments beyond the original ten—the one they carried in their shirt pockets when attending militia meetings.

But it was not what they thought that mattered most—it was what they did that counted, and their decision in November 1995 to sponsor a talk by Ron Arnold, the hate-mongering Wise Use propagandist from the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise in Bellevue, was one they’d come to regret. Arnold, “Merchant of Fear” Alan Gottlieb’s partner, is a not so subtle master of violent rhetoric, who covers himself by claiming his calls to “kill the bastards” (environmentalists) are metaphorical.

Movement entrepreneurs Arnold and Cushman--national players who mobilize ruffians to carry the banner for industry--generate violence toward Indians and environmentalists from coast to coast. According to Western States Center researcher [Jon Lunsford](#) crimes including “animal mutilation, property damage, death threats, arson, assault and battery, bombings, and attempted murder” follow in their wake. In May 1988, says Rudolph C. Ryser in [Anti-Indian Movement on the Tribal Frontier](#) Cushman was the featured speaker at Protect America’s Rights and Resource’s national convention in Wisconsin, held to oppose honoring Indian treaties. Shortly after, Indian fishermen there were assaulted and shot at by sports fishermen. We had done our research, our education, and our organizing; now it was time for community action before someone ended up dead.

The week before, on November 11, 1995 (Veterans Day), another event took place that had Paul and me in an excited state of mind. Paul’s sister Claire had received a call early that Saturday morning from a friend who’d passed the Rome Grange on the way to town, and seen a large sign out front announcing “Washington State Militia.” Paul called me before breakfast to arrange a rendezvous at the Grange. He and Claire would sit on one side of the room, visibly taking notes and tape-recording if it seemed safe, and I would sit on the other side of the room blending in. Paul had become known by his presence at several recruiting events in Snohomish and Whatcom Counties, and had been fingered as a hostile reporter at one near Everett. I was still perhaps unknown by, as we referred to them, the dangerous fringe of the Far Right.

I arrived a little early and stood on the front porch to get a sense of the crowd. Security people with walkie-talkies and long dark rain coats were hanging around showing people where to park and steering them to the basement for coffee before the meeting started upstairs. I chatted one of them up with small talk, and moseyed downstairs to get coffee. Shortly after the pledge of allegiance and welcome, Paul and Claire entered and sat across the room toward the front. I noticed a few heads turn as his presence was whispered back and forth. After a couple of warm up speakers who lamented the “browning of America” by immigrants, and warned of the police state that would take their children, wives, and other property, an out-of-uniform Sheriff Brandland came in eating a bag of popcorn and sat opposite me on the bench under the window. When the presentations started to get repetitive, Paul and Claire walked out. The Sheriff left after a bit as well.

When the refreshments break came, I held back and pretended to be interested in some of the recruitment flyers they’d passed out. I noticed the keynote speaker, Keith Anderson (recently convicted of securities fraud) was speaking sotto voce to his assistant near the window. I pretended to not be interested and only strayed as close as necessary to pick up their conversation. It was almost surreal, looking at large, old-fashioned, framed portraits of George Washington and other founding fathers--hung between handmade quilts commemorating Grange events—and listening to conspirators who advocated armed insurrection. If you can imagine John Brown at the *Walton’s*, you’ve got some idea of the incongruity.

It had been worth the wait; what I heard them say was, “Trochman’s coming to speak at the Lakeway Inn. Things are gonna start happening. He doesn’t fuck around.” John Trochman was the leader of the Militia of Montana, a heavily armed outfit that wasn’t above robbing banks, storming county jails to bust out their buddies, and engaging in shoot-outs with state police when pulled over for traffic infractions.

To avoid suspicion, I wandered downstairs and availed myself of the voluminous tabled handouts free-for-the-taking and returned upstairs with the boys. When Anderson’s speech on how to evade taxes and launder money concluded, I decided it was time to find Paul. He quickly made some calls to Eric in Seattle and Task Force leaders in Bellingham to develop a response. When they spoke with the management of the Bellingham Lakeway Inn, the Trochman reservation was cancelled, forcing the militia recruiters to relocate their event to Mt. Vernon, thirty miles south. With this advance warning, human rights activists in Skagit County merged with those from Whatcom in protest on the day of the big event.

Eric was terrified with, “the idea of militias being able to utilize the electoral force of Wise Use groups” to legitimize racist based policies regionally and nationally. In Whatcom, Snohomish, and Chelan Counties, this epidemic was in full swing. We’d made significant progress constraining political violence in our region in 1995, but we had a ways to go before everyone could feel safe again to participate in public affairs. 1996 would be a turning point.

## PART SIX

As I began my third year as executive director of Whatcom Environmental Council, I

realized it would also be my last. I was growing weary of the toll exacted on my home life, our social life, and our economic well-being. I think I was becoming depressed. Traumatic stress doesn't have to happen all at once, as with a natural disaster or man-made cataclysmic event. It can accumulate in the psyche, and manifest itself in increased use of drugs like alcohol, tobacco and marijuana. According to Ezra S. Susser, writing in August 2002 *Scientific American*, The World Health Organization finds, "...that depression is the fourth leading cause of disease and disability worldwide... WHO estimates that by 2020 depression will be the world's second leading cause of premature death and disability."

Demoralization that leads to depression can be headed off by a sense of community and social cohesion, a sense of common purpose. I no longer sensed this in Whatcom County. When I walked through downtown, passing favorite haunts like The Bagelry and the Newsstand, I felt like the protagonist in the movie *Pleasantville*, like I no longer knew the town I'd lived in for twenty-five years. I wasn't sure what to do, but I knew big changes were in store. I told my comrades and associates that this would be it—I would see through the cases we had on the docket, which would carry us through early August, and would then step aside.

In the wake of Paul's report on Wise Use, other counties began to make headway in reclaiming their governments from the Building Industry/property-rights thugs. Chelan, Snohomish, and Jefferson County voters dumped the rebels that had brought such derision to public affairs. In Whatcom County, with the help of the *Bellingham Herald*, Wise Use consolidated its control of the County Council.

Our focus on the integrity of public process, as opposed to issue advocacy, allowed our concerns to resonate beyond our borders. By helping Paul de Armond, Whatcom Environmental Council was instrumental in helping topple corrupt administrations and their violent supporters in Chelan and Snohomish Counties in particular, perhaps others. In January 1996, a group of people associated with organized labor, Common Cause, League of Women Voters, and Evergreen State College, invited Paul and me to a Growth Management conference in Olympia. Attended by activists from around the state, the discussion, for me, illuminated a second political blind spot. The first blind spot, the one that made the 1993 coups d'état possible, was the Washington Property Rights Network--the realtors, builders, and developers who covertly enlisted Wise Use operatives to stir up a pseudo grassroots rebellion in 14 counties, through the formation of local property-rights groups. The second blind spot was the liberal establishment, which consisted of politicians, bureaucrats, and union officials in bed with the trade and industry elite that had conspired to obstruct public process and usurp elections in the first place.

According to Paul, "The labor thugs [especially those that represented public employees] very forthrightly explained they had no option but to take over the Democratic Party in order to control and direct money-laundering after the Public Disclosure Act was amended by initiative. I think that's when I lost hope for reform."

What they were saying, in essence, was that elections, and consequently public policy, would no longer be determined by voters, but rather by what author Walter Karp calls, "the indispensable enemies" of organized labor and big business, through the respective political parties they controlled--to the detriment of everyone else. Without stating it in these terms, politics to them was a matter of turf battles between competing white-collar criminals--more sophisticated and less violent than those between Sicilian crime families--

-but structurally and dynamically the same. Deception, fraud, extortion, and coercion were simply tools of the trade.

While this pattern had its exceptions, it fit neatly with the state of affairs in Whatcom County, where Central Labor Council director Dave Warren and his labor goons threatened and assaulted progressive activists and Lummi Indians elected as Precinct Committee Officers to the Whatcom Democratic Party in the September 1996 primary. In January 1996, though, I found this reality very discomfiting.

July 1996 brought several surprises to Whatcom County, not the least of which was a press conference by the U.S. Department of Justice, announcing the bust of eight local individuals for involvement in bomb-making and illegal modification of firearms into fully-automatic weapons—machine guns. News of this development, given the growth in militia organizing activities of the past year and a half, made Paul de Armond and I very concerned. Paul installed motion detectors and lights around his home. I started closing the blinds at night—drawing the heavy brocaded curtains over the windows in the living room where I often sat up late reading. I never said anything about why I was doing this, hoping to spare Marianne some worry. I guess I was only sparing myself, though. I realized this when she asked me if I thought someone might try to poison our dogs. I wondered if I'd be shot in my recliner some evening.

Paul shared information with local and federal law enforcement agents, but the communication was strictly one-way. As a member of the Whatcom Human Rights Task Force Speaker's Bureau, I'd been lecturing at adult education forums in local churches about the danger posed by community silence. Most of my time consisted of undoing the years of misinformation published in the Herald. We were apparently a long way from the start of a sustained community response to domestic terrorism. We would perhaps never get there.

The morning of the DOJ press conference, Paul was again stuck at work, so I picked up our video of the Washington State Militia gathering and drove down to the Bellingham Police Station where the press conference was to be held. When I arrived, there were three huge, mobile, satellite-hookup news vans from Seattle television stations in the parking lot, a temporary chain link fence surrounding the station, and plainclothes agents—sporting sunglasses and earphones—all over the place. A handful of our friends from Whatcom Human Rights Task Force were standing outside the fence taking it all in. When I walked up to them, they informed me that the feds had told them that only officials, credentialed media, and cops were allowed inside. I noticed the reporters wandering around looking for someone to interview were all wearing media dog tags, so I decided to create the appearance I was one of them. Stepping up into the van of one of the major network affiliates, I interrupted a news team in the middle of organizing the sequence of their coverage and monitoring their satellite connection on the several live screens in the wall of electronics running the length of the walk-in van. They were pretty hyper, and seemed to overlook my presence, until I said, "I have a videotape of the militia meeting with me." All conversation stopped. The reporter, a short good-looking blonde, all made up for her broadcast, moved toward me like an animal stalking its prey and asked me how much I wanted for it. Caught by surprise with her question, I responded that they could air it now and negotiate the price with Paul later. Her technician then ran the tape while I pointed out the ring leaders and the reporter selected the segments she wanted for her newscast.

When it was time to go inside the police station, I walked behind the news team, and when stopped by the armed agent at the entrance for lack of a dog tag, I produced a Public Good Project business card, which I referred to as an online media publication, and was escorted by another federal agent into the conference. Once inside, I joined the reporters, Mayor Asmundson, and State Representative Goldsmith in ogling the sawed-off shotguns, grenades, and machine guns, and then took a seat for the DOJ performance. After the brief statements to the press about their investigation, that culminated in several arrests and seizures of illegal weapons, and the follow up questions--all completed in less than half an hour--we filed out while reporters snagged interviews.

Outside, I spotted a late arrival from *Northwest News*, a regional independent 24-hour news station, and walked over to introduce myself to see if he wanted an interview. Grateful to be filled in on the background, and steered toward other potential interviewees, he ran several minutes live, and thanked me for the help. Later, when I debriefed with Paul, he decided to ask a standard \$300 from the network affiliate for the tape, which we could readily use to defray our costs in running around the countryside. The network agreed it was a fair price, but in the end stiffed us for the entire amount.

## PART SEVEN

In August 1996, after four and a half years of cover-up by the *Bellingham Herald*, the CLUE/militia connection was finally revealed in the *Portland Oregonian*. This was soon followed by an article in the *Anacortes American*, the first coverage by a paper inside the legislative district Skip Richards hoped to represent. Quoted as a background source in the *Oregonian*, I was becoming increasingly concerned for the safety of my family. After all, my face had just been broadcast on regional television as a militia-buster, and I figured if anything was going to happen, it might already be underway. Meanwhile, Bill Wassmuth and Eric Ward, down at the Northwest Coalition for Human Dignity office in Seattle, were busy making sense of things for the metro news audience.

In October, trailing distantly in the polls, candidate Richards chose to play the race card in the general election, insinuating in his campaign literature that the Indians (presumably through guarding their treaty rights) were undermining all that the white people had struggled to build in Whatcom County. His scofflaw buddy Bill Geyer's County Executive campaign also flopped, in spite of the Herald's refusal to connect him as a founder of CLUE.

On January 15, 1997, the trial of eight Washington State Militia members began in federal court in Seattle. One of their secretly recorded conversations, introduced as evidence, included a discussion about a route through the heavily wooded Whatcom Falls Park to the rear of the home of Whatcom Human Rights Task Force Chair Damani Johnson. Some of the defendants were set free due to a juror's inability to follow the judge's instructions; others went to prison for four years. *Bellingham Herald* crime reporter, Cathy Logg--who courageously covered the arrests and had her home and computer broken into--eventually moved away from Whatcom County.

Malcolm Gladwell, in the Crime and Science article published in the February 24, 1997 issue of *New Yorker* magazine, wrote about why some people turn into violent criminals. "New evidence," he says, "suggests that it may all be in the brain."

In the opening paragraph of [Damaged](#), Gladwell describes the racist, anti-semitic, mass murderer, Joseph Paul Franklin, sitting in front of the judge in Clayton, Missouri

completely still except for his left leg, which bounced up and down in an unceasing nervous motion. Just like Gene Goldsmith's did at the Laurel Grange revival meeting. According to Gladwell, Dorothy Otnow Lewis--a psychiatrist at New York's Bellevue Hospital, who over the past twenty years has examined roughly two hundred murderers--concluded that Franklin was "a psychotic whose thinking was delusional and confused" due to "brutal physical abuse he had suffered as a child." The blows to the head inflicted by his mother, she said, accounted for his "bizarre statements and beliefs." Although he didn't seem insane, she didn't feel that Franklin's brain worked the way brains are supposed to work--that he had identifiable biological and psychiatric problems.

When I read this article, I couldn't avoid thinking of the Wise Use zealots, Citizens for Liberty, the Committee for Environmental Justice, and some of the fanatic fundamentalists steering the Whatcom Republican Party. As Lewis noted, some sociopaths are not evil; "They are driven by forces beyond their control." Driven described to a "T" the malcontents I'd observed first hand over the past five years. They were driven to harangue anyone who disagreed with them. They were driven to organize, petition, lobby, and demonstrate against sex education, against the teaching of Evolution, against homosexuals, against environmental sanity, and perhaps most tellingly--against talking circles in the elementary schools--used to assist teachers in detecting victims of child abuse. Local *Wise Use* Women in Timber activists viewed this and Outcome-based Education as intolerable intrusions into the inviolate domain of family life--the realm where the man was autocratic head of the household--where wife-battering, child-beating, and even incest were no business of social workers or society at large.

The touchstone of family autonomy was something I'd heard repeated by these women in many venues. It came as no surprise when Citizens for Liberty/Washington State Militia member Fred Fisher was revealed as having been convicted of forcing repeated sexual intercourse on his nine-year-old foster daughter.

More importantly, these relatively small groups of neurotics were driven in 1993 to take over the legislative branches of Bellingham and Whatcom County governments. Public policy in city hall and the courthouse wasn't just corrupt--it was literally insane. Gladwell observes that in 1963, when Dorothy Lewis graduated from Yale School of Medicine, neurology--the study of the brain and the rest of the nervous system--and psychiatry--the study of behavior and personality--were entirely separate fields. Criminals were just like us, went the established litany, only they had been given bad ideas about how to behave. The trouble was that when she began working with delinquents, writes Gladwell, they didn't seem like that at all...they seemed to be damaged and impaired. Lewis says, "I discovered that many of these kids had had serious accidents, injuries, or illnesses that seemed to have affected the central nervous system..."

I called Paul and told him about the article. It seemed vital to understanding some of the madness around Whatcom politics--indeed national politics after the 1994 mid-term Congressional elections. Remember the Contract with America crap? U.S. Representative Helen Chenoweth? Reverend Moon? Anyone sane enough to manipulate the damaged ones for political power is very evil indeed--and dangerous.

Dorothy Lewis' colleague, Jonathan Pincus--a neurologist at Georgetown University--became convinced that "Almost all the violent ones [criminals] were damaged." Gladwell claims They [Lewis and Pincus] believe that the most vicious criminals are,

overwhelmingly, people with some combination of abusive childhoods, brain injuries, and psychotic symptoms... somehow these factors together create such terrifying synergy as to impede these individuals' ability to play by the rules of society.

Gladwell tells us the entire outside of the brain is covered in a thick carpet of gray matter—the cortex. It is the function of the cortex—and, in particular, those parts of the cortex beneath the forehead, known as the frontal lobes—to modify the impulses that surge up from within the brain, to provide judgment, to organize behavior and decision-making, to learn and adhere to rules of everyday life. It is the dominance of the cortex and the frontal lobes, in other words, that is responsible for making us human. Stuart Yudofsky, the chairman of psychiatry at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston told him, “Our cortex helps us figure out when we are and are not in danger. Our memory tells us what we should be frightened of and angry with and what we shouldn't... if it's impaired—one can understand how that would lead to confusion, to problems with disinhibition, to violence.”

Since there is no objective standard for judgment, Pincus, says Gladwell, tries to pick up evidence of an inability to cope with complexity, a lack of connection between experience and decision-making which is characteristic of cortical dysfunction—the inability to adapt to a new situation. Like, say, the modern day White Supremacists Paul and I observed at militia recruiting meetings in Whatcom and Snohomish Counties? The ones who claimed that filing legal affidavits with county clerks declaring themselves white, property-owning males exempted them from paying taxes? The ones who asserted the County Sheriff is the highest law enforcement officer in the country? Like the ones holding Sodom and Gomorra placards in front of a photo exhibit at Bellingham City Hall of gay and lesbian people in the workplace? Not every suspected fruitcake was as cut and dry as the Larouchites who occasionally set up a table in front of the Bellingham Central Post Office. I wondered where to draw the line between ignorance and mental deficiency. As Gladwell observes, child abuse has devastating psychological consequences for children and the adults they become... prolonged child abuse is a key to understanding criminal behavior because abuse also appears to change the anatomy of the brain... brain scans of children who have been severely neglected [show] that their cortical and sub-cortical areas never developed properly... were roughly twenty or thirty percent smaller than normal. Bruce Perry, a psychiatrist at Baylor College of Medicine, told Gladwell, “There are parts of the brain that are involved in attachment behavior—the connectedness of one individual to another—and in order for that to be expressed we have to have a certain nature of experience and have that experience at the right time. If early in life you are not touched and held and given all the somatosensory stimuli that are associated with what we call love, that part of the brain is not organized in the same way.”

All the “tough love” doctrine espoused by the Far Right came flooding back as I read these words. I imagined some of the horrors that must be taking place daily in some of the homes of families where religious fanaticism and other delusions fostered a siege mentality. Clearly, not every bigot had been dropped on his or her head as a child, or fallen off a ladder as an adult, but I couldn't help but wonder how many had. According to Perry, “Such a person is literally lacking some brain organization that would allow him to actually make strong connections to other human beings... after age two—they've missed that critical window.”

I think it was about this time that Paul mentioned to me that his father, Fred, had worked in public health administration where he produced educational films. He said Fred later went into making documentaries for a subsidiary of KING Broadcasting in Seattle. It was there, in the early 60s, while Paul and Claire were in elementary school, that Fred came under threat from Far Right anti-communist zealots known as the Minutemen. Fred had produced a documentary on these holdovers from the McCarthy era of the 1950s, and they had in turn threatened Fred and his young family. It made a strong impression on Paul and Claire, who'd been raised Unitarian and spent their summer vacations volunteering in migrant worker camps near Yakima. When the same violent, racist rhetoric and threatening behavior erupted in 1990s Whatcom County, it was all too familiar.

## PART EIGHT

Gladwell notes that abuse also disrupts the brain's stress-response system...by releasing several waves of hormones, the last of which is cortisol...[too much of which] begins to eat away at the organ of the brain known as the hippocampus, which serves as the brain's archivist... J. Douglas Bremner, a psychiatrist at Yale, has measured the damage that cortisol does by taking MRI scans of adults who suffered severe sexual or physical abuse as children. If you look at Bremner's scans, says Gladwell, memory loss [in survivors] begins to make sense: the archivist in their brain has been crippled.

Martin Teicher, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard and McLean Hospital, says Gladwell, recently gave EEGs to a hundred and fifteen children who had been admitted to a psychiatric facility, some of whom had a documented history of abuse. Not only did the rate of abnormal EEGs among the abused turn out to be twice that of the non-abused but all those abnormal brain scans turned out to be a result of problems on the left side of the brain. Something in the brain's stress response, Teicher theorized, was interfering with the balanced development of the brain's hemispheres...Taken together, these changes in brain hardware are more than simple handicaps. They are, in both subtle and fundamental ways, corrosive of self. Richard McNally, a professor of psychology at Harvard says, "The ability to solve problems in the here and now depends on one's ability to access specific autobiographical memories in which one has encountered similar problems in the past. It depends on knowing what worked and what didn't. With that ability impaired, abuse survivors cannot find coherence in their lives. Their sense of identity breaks down."

"What you get is a kind of erratic-ness," says Frank Putnam, who heads the Unit on Developmental Traumatology at the National Institute of Mental Health, in Maryland.

"These kinds of people can be very different in one situation compared with another. There is the sense that they don't have a larger moral compass."

Reading Gladwell's article, I began to sense that at least some of Richards' and Hinkle's followers were doing so because they couldn't figure things out, because they couldn't adapt, and, more frighteningly, because Richards and Hinkle told them they were OK. (Maybe by Richards' and Hinkle's standards they were.) If you'd been rejected in any way by society: hassled by teachers and social workers; repeatedly laid off for screwing up; warned or arrested by cops for threatening people; or just made fun of by arrogant liberals who called you stupid--and suddenly someone who seems to know the score tells

you it's not your fault—you just might be willing to focus your aggression on the targets your leader provides.

According to Gladwell, abuse, in and of itself, does not necessarily result in violence, any more than neurological impairment or psychosis does. However, Lewis and Pincus, he says, argue that if you mix these conditions together they become dangerous, that they have a kind of pathological synergy, that, like the ingredients of a bomb, they are troublesome individually but explosive in combination.

I thought of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols. I tried to imagine the ticking brain bombs in some Vietnam and Gulf War vets, in incarcerated foster children, in young black males beat up by wild street cops, in those denied medical drugs and treatment because they lack insurance. Then I thought of people who believed their job or their one asset—their home, their land—might be taken by “eco-Nazis” or “lazy Indians,” and I began to appreciate the powder keg Skip Richards, Art Castle, and Bill Geyer had been toying with. What they'd done was not only criminal and immoral—it was cruel.

Fall of 1997, Whatcom County Executive Pete Kremen dumped County Health Officer Dr. Frank James for telling the truth about widespread groundwater pollution from pesticides that had poisoned many private wells. Dr. James had also declared Lake Whatcom a “severe health hazard.” This revenge on an admittedly belated whistle blower was the third to take place over water contamination exposure under the *Wise Use* reign of terror: County Planning Director Dan Taylor had been canned for merely designating county aquifers in need of protection, and County Hearing Examiner Ed Good--the first to go--had been unceremoniously booted by the Council just months before vesting his retirement, in retaliation for his Lake Whatcom decision.

Four years of purging Whatcom County government of any responsible officials willing to protect public health and safety begged for State action. Indeed, the new Governor, Gary Locke--through letters from State agencies and Hearings Boards--had received documentation delineating lawless and intransigent behavior by county officials. He also received numerous requests from good government groups for an investigation of the corruption that had taken hold of elections and governance in Whatcom County. The requests fell on deaf ears.

1998 was the year Marianne and I departed to begin a new life in the Bay Area north of San Francisco. The bright spot in this time of change and imminent departure was the gathering of all the community activists we had helped around the county for a photo shoot and dessert social. As my final task before packing up our belongings in our VW van to head for San Francisco, I loaded up my file cabinet and delivered them to the local alternative press *Every Other Weekly* office. For a community to move forward, it needs to know where it's been. My contribution to local history would be in good hands.

[Postscript: As of September 2005, former CLUE board member/convicted insurance fraud Bruce Ayers was Chairman of the Whatcom Republican Party. Racist ex-KGMI talkshow host Jeff Kent was busy serving as Republican National Committeeman.]

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