

Naked in Eden

My Adventure and Awakening in the Australian Rainforest

Suggested Interview Questions:

- **How did an East Coast young woman end up in the wilds of the Australian Rainforest?**

I might not have ended up there if I hadn't been living with autism. Albeit a mild form of autism, it was still enough that I didn't fit into my culture. Living with autism already placed me out on the fringe of my culture. So when along comes this Australian guy, whom I met in America and fell madly in love with, and he's going back to Australia, I thought, "Why not go with him?" I felt like I had nothing else in my life.

The system that most people move into once they leave high school or college didn't exist for me. It was like this gray world that I couldn't grasp. And yet I wanted to belong to something. So when Ian came along, there was something I could be part of. He was escaping family pressures and we ended up in the bush. It was an extreme move in many ways. I wasn't going there to study science, or to build a house, or get a job, or be with family. There was no set goal. It was just something to do that didn't demand a lot of me.

- **How was your relationship with the forest in Maine different from your relationship with the rainforest in Australia?**

On one level it wasn't. I always loved Nature and being in the woods. Even in the midst of my autistic state, Nature was one place where I could feel myself and wasn't numb. I felt beautiful and alive, and experienced Nature as something magical. I was starved for it and hungered for something more than my days at school. And yet, I still didn't know what I hungered for or how to go about attaining it. I even dreamed of having great adventures, but didn't really know what they were.

In the Australian Rainforest I eventually developed the same kind of relationship as with the forest in Maine, but it took awhile. In Maine there were no poisonous snakes, stringing trees, crocodiles or paralysis ticks. So I could just crash through the forest and not worry too much. Maybe watch for a bit of poison ivy, but I could identify that when I was three years old. I never worried about black bears; in fact it was a treat if we saw one before it ran off. But in the rainforest in Australia there were creatures and plants I had to be aware of.

- **What do you think kept you from fleeing such a dangerous environment?**

Having mild autism prevented me from fully fitting into my culture. Growing up I didn't fit into my family. I wasn't clear enough to interact with my parents to heal and strengthen relationships. I didn't know how to reciprocate friendships. I couldn't comprehend going to college. I didn't even know how to get a job, although I did it. All those things weren't a part of my reality. When you have even mild autism you don't know that you can ask people how to do those things. Your way back in this fog and you drift along like a piece of fluff on the wind.

Luckily for, something came out of nowhere; it was a man. I fell utterly in love with him, and that was the first real thing I fully felt. So I followed him and ended up in the rainforest. I thought it would be this magical experience, but then there were all these deadly creatures. My initial response was, "Oh no, this isn't what's supposed to happen. This is a nightmare." So there I was thousands of miles away from everything I'd ever known. Technically I suppose I could have left the rainforest, but I only had so much money. I'd driven thousands of miles up the coast of Australia. I'd gone through mud and leeches, watched for crocodiles, forded streams, driven over washouts, driven along a beach at low tide, and winched up a little cliff face. It wasn't one of those times where I could just turn the truck around and go home.

So I'm out there and I'm scared, wondering how I'm ever going to be able to relax with all the deadly creepy crawlies, and I was angry. I felt that life owed me something better. But at some point I realized anger wasn't going to get me anywhere, so I started to ask myself really honest questions, something I'd never done before. I also looked at what I had to return to if I did return to the States. Did I really want to live with my parents? No. Did I really want to go to college? No, I'd die of frightful boredom. Did I really want to leave my husband? No, I was passionately in love with him. Did I really want to return to modeling? No, it wasn't me at all. Was there anything that I could latch onto? No.

So when I looked at all the possibilities that I could grasp within the framework of my autism, none of them were real, and none of them were what I wanted. So there was nothing to return to. For me, nothing else existed. So in essence I was stuck there. Life had lured me into this totally bizarre situation. I thought it was going to be one thing and it was very different, and yet it was exactly what I needed to grow. There I was face to face with Robin, beyond retreat. In a magical way Life tricked me into the forest, tricked me into awakening. Ian was the lure, and I took the bait when I fell crazy in love with him.

- **Do you feel that your life would have changed if you had never stepped foot in the rainforest?**

After I'd been in the rainforest and started to awaken, I realized that had I not gone into the forest at age twenty-five, I would not have lived to be thirty. I would have died.

Before going to the forest I had a precancerous vaginal cyst, my kidneys and bladder were riddled with massive infection, and I had to have my bladder regularly pumped full of liquid antibiotics. I was on multiple antibiotics at once. All of that coupled with the autism didn't leave me much room to fight for my life. Emotionally, mentally and physically I was waning. You have to remember that with the autism I had trouble reasoning, which in many ways made it much harder, if not impossible, to be proactive in my life. The miracle is that Life intervened and sent me Ian, all the way from Australia to America . I grabbed him like a lifeline and hung on.

Death was occurring because of my disconnection from the whole, my lack of awareness or awakened state. I was not living in connection with Spirit and the Earth, the things that really sustain us, and without them we are dying. We can appear in perfect health, walking around, but we still wonder why we are depressed, why we ache, why we desperately yearn, why we feel so lethargic and dissatisfied, seemingly irrational and angry, why we suffer, and why we die. We are currently living in disconnection from the rest of life on the planet. And that connection is so crucial that reestablished it could revolutionize our lives all over the globe

- **You've written of a personal transformation in your understanding of your place in the world. What experience triggered that?**

When I first went into the rainforest I feared poisonous snakes (some of the worlds deadliest snakes), paralysis ticks, poisonous jellyfish, stinging trees, crocodiles in the sea and more. But once I realized I was going to stay in the forest, I knew I had to be aware because I was now part of the food chain. I had to learn about the creatures I lived with. I'd never had to be so aware in my life. I could no longer bungle along unconsciously like I'd done previously. So I started to learn about the life around me, its habits, its needs, where it was found, and what time of day or night it was active.

The more I observed life in the forest the more I grew to respect its survival skills. All this life had to be aware twenty-four hours a day, otherwise it might be eaten. Everything in the forest was part of The Great Circle of Life, life eating itself to create more life. That awareness made me respect everything around me because I too had to survive. In recognizing my own need to survive and be aware, I developed tremendous respect for the life around me. It was that respect that made me part of the community of beings who not only had learned to survive, but had learned to thrive. I fell in love with them. I thought, "Okay, I'm right here with you. I am part of you. I am one of you." I was finally plugged me back into the circle of Life, that whole community of life out there.

- **Since the forest is such a big part of who you are, do you feel incomplete as you function here in today's society?**

I have two answers to that and they are totally opposite, and yet part of each other. First I would say, no, I'll never be incomplete again. And secondly, I would say, yes, I am absolutely incomplete if I don't have regular time communing with the wild. I know without doubt that my life will lead me back to live with the land in some capacity. It will be its own unique adventure down the road.

Because of my time in the rainforest I am more complete here in society than ever before in my life. I'm about as complete as any of us can be. I feel empowered, fearless around people, thrive on new experiences. When you handle potentially deadly snakes and live amongst all those creatures, you end up falling desperately in love with Mother Nature, and your whole value system changes. You never see society in the same light again. You see through all pretense, it's just people, it's just a job, it's not the end of the world. I've been to ends of the world. So now this is easy.

So on one hand I'm more complete. I'm full. I'm enriched. I see the world and my culture through wild eyes and I allow those aspects of me to live here in society. Aspects like spontaneity, passion and being fearless are all things I became in the forest.

On the other hand the thought of living in society for the rest of my life and never living long segments of time in the wild is horrifying for me. I need the wildness. I need to know it's there, that I can go to it and kneel upon the Earth, cry and rejoice there, lay myself upon it to be restored, healed and loved. And to give the same back. I need to absorb it into me because it is me. I have become the Earth. So in returning to the wild I return to myself, as well as that which birthed me.

- **How is your understanding of the earth different now than before your rainforest adventure?**

I grew up in small town Maine without a TV. Dad got rid of it when I was a little girl because he wanted his children to live life instead of watch it. He took all six of his kids into Nature, camping, hiking, and canoeing. Although I had this gift, it was only on weekends or occasionally an evening after school. Even with two parents that loved nature, the greater part of my life was spent in school. Roughly nine months was spent sitting still at a desk for hours, with florescent lights overhead, often no decorations on the concrete walls, not even a house plant on the sill, and my time was spent memorizing facts that had little or nothing to do with my life. That was my life. Due to lack of time outdoors, Nature was only like scenery to me, a back drop. I didn't see it as something I was part of. I thought the "real" world was church, school, our house, Dad's job, the grocery store and our car. Those things were the "real" world. And then Nature was just scenery. "Oh look at the view. Isn't it pretty?"

After I went into the rainforest my perspective changed. Nature became the real world for me. And the human community, or civilization--all the things I just listed, towns, cars, offices, and schools--was a very small part of that. The bigger world for me became Nature. That's where my roots are anchored. I see it as a living being that birthed me like a mother. That's where my origins, my ancestors began. My ancestors go all the way back to the beginning of existence, all the way back to where dust and gases came together to form Earth, and there were microorganism, which evolved from one species to another, all the way to humans. That's where I come from. It's where my roots are anchored. Earth is no longer seen as scenery. It is its own living, powerful, dynamic, infinite life force.

- **Can you more fully describe your vision of the relationship humans can have with the wild? What does the wild give to us?**

My impulse is to say, "It can give us everything." It can give us all that we seek and need. In essence, all that we already are, but have forgotten. There is healing in Nature. How does Nature heal? Point blank, it's alive! Nature is life concentrated. Everything in Nature that we stand or sit upon is alive. It feels us. However, in my culture, growing up, it was only the people in the buildings who were alive, maybe a house plant on the windowsill. But the furniture, the walls, and everything surrounding me was sort of non-organic. Even though I believe everything has energy, in Nature we are pumped full of mega doses of life. That transforms us. It's healing. Little kids feel this immediately when they are put into Nature. They become excited and innately want to connect. In that connection is Love.

Because of the destruction humans are doing to the planet, I often hear people say that Mother Earth is angry with us, and will punish us. But my experience is that Mother Earth is one hundred percent pure love. That's all she is. We humans could throw ourselves so far out of balance by polluting our water and air that we gravely suffer or even kill ourselves. But that's not Nature committing some punishing act toward us. No, we've done that ourselves. Nature just is. And in that "just is" there is an absence of judgment and hate. There is total acceptance and love.

- **How does living wild in the rainforest differ from living in a small city, where you now live?**

Once I got past my fear of the poisonous snakes, ticks, jellyfish and watching for crocodiles in the sea, I fell in love with the forest, it was very easy living in the wild. There was no judgment, no time, no sense of distance. More importantly, there was total compassion and enormous space to explore who I was. I think this is available in my culture today, but I believe we have to be on your toes and be very aware of it. We have to stake a claim to it because it's not always just given to us. I live in a culture where people can be quick to judge, assume things, be set in their thinking, beliefs, religion, and sense of right and wrong.

So in many ways space and peace aren't always something where we can just sit back and let fall into our laps. It may be something that we have to create, or consciously take time out to experience. We are surrounded by constant input. The culture I live in can push in on us; there are a lot of demands, a lot media coming at us. We have to consciously choose, consciously ask ourselves what we're going to let in, what do we need to create space, and how can we slow things down a bit and take timeout to ponder who we are and what we want.

Just like in the forest, there are a lot of challenges and fears in society that we have the opportunity to face. For some it might be public speaking, learning to love openly, getting a new job, letting go of an unhealthy relationship, learning to drive a car, fear of heights or water. Everyday we have opportunities to reach out to others, to love people we don't even know. Many people are afraid to do that. We can even be afraid to forgive ourselves and others, afraid to foster interactions that allow life to "happen". There are always opportunities to continually expand our comfort zone and grow. No matter where we live we still have to overcome our personal fear. Facing my fear in the rainforest made me pretty much fearless out here. This is just another jungle, another challenge.

- **If you had the chance today, do you think you would choose to live in such raw conditions?**

Absolutely! And I won't just wait for the opportunity. I'll actively choose to do that at some point because it's just so thrilling. No matter how long you live in the wild there is always something new to see. There are events that take place every day, and even if you're there for years you might only see them once in a lifetime. It's astounding to watch a praying mantis tear the exoskeleton off a bee's belly before eating it. The whole time the bee's stinger is trying to strike the mantis. Or to watch the birth of a beautiful butterfly who only lives a few days before it's life cycle is complete. These things are amazing. Everyday millions of little events like these take place in the forest. No matter how many I saw, every time I was left speechless. Every time I felt how precious my own life is. Even today I go back to Nature to learn more, see more. I go back for the stark reality of it. I go back to experience my place in all of it, to feel a solid sense of Robin. I return to Nature for her honesty and love. In the wild there is no hiding from ourselves or the basic laws of Nature.

- **How do the lessons learned so far away, in such a foreign environment have relevance here in today's society?**

Because Nature is the missing peace. Lessons learned in Nature are core lessons, a core part of us. They're part of our evolution, part of our ancestry. Learning to be aware in the rainforest where there are potentially deadly creatures can easily be applied to learning to be aware in our culture or wherever we are. No matter where we live we have opportunities to overcome fears and challenges.

- **What do you hope the reader will take away from reading your book?**

I would hope that they would take with them a feeling of love for themselves, the world around them, and a sense of a much larger community that they are part of, beyond their own community of humans, beyond their human culture of work, schools, offices, cars and human busyness. I would hope that they might begin to understand and feel that they are part of this huge community and know it as infinite and loving. Understand that it wants to love them and be loved by them.

- **What is the condition of the rainforest today? What can readers do to help the rainforests and ecosystems everywhere?**

As to the current condition of the Daintree Rainforest, parts of it now are designated World Heritage Area (WHA) and are protected. The Daintree is the only place in the world where two world heritage areas sit side by side, the Daintree Rainforest WHA and the Great Barrier Reef WHA, which is just off the coast. However, this does not mean the Daintree is protected. It is the lowland rainforest, or the coastal strip, that is unprotected and at risk by human encroachment and piecemeal development.

To learn more about the Daintree or get involved in protecting it, I would go to www.Austrop.org.au. Google Austrop. You can do internships or volunteer at the research station in the rainforest. Or you can donate money, which go toward various projects and to help keep the center open and functioning. From the Austrop website you can contact Dr. Huge Spencer for more information.

To help protect rainforests world wide, there is a great organization called RAN – Rainforest Action Network. <http://ran.org/> Go to their site to educate yourself on the world's rainforests and find out how you can help.

As to what people can do right now: Turn off unused lights, use energy conserving light bulbs, don't let the water run when you brush your teeth, shave or wash your hands, turn the shower water off when soaping up, shampooing or using conditioner, use water only to get wet and to rinse. Use a water conserving shower head. Recycle all paper, glass, cardboard, plastic, metal, printer cartridges, and so on. Don't use plastic bags. They get blown onto our streets, carried into storm drains during heavy rain and end up in the sea. Sea birds and mammals die from eating them because they mistake the bags for jellyfish. There are miles of floating plastic in places like The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, which contains millions of tons of plastics. Keep a canvas bag in your car and take it into every shop you go into, not just the grocery store. Take them into the book store, the hardware store, the office supply store, everywhere you go. Keep canvas bags in your car and if you forget to take them into the store, go back to your car and get them, or wheel your groceries out to your car in a cart and put them in the trunk, without bags. Politely tell the checkout people you don't want a plastic bag; they are harmful to the environment. Let other's in line hear you say it. If people stop using plastic bags the stores will no longer supply them.

Don't buy plastic wrapped food, plastic bottles of water. Have a filter at home and refill your own container with water and take it with you. Or buy a stainless steel filtration bottle that you can refill from a tap.

Don't buy helium filled balloons. They can drift hundreds of miles and end up in the sea. The deflated balloons are mistaken for food and eaten by sea life.

If you are building a home consider healthy non-toxic and recycled building materials, solar, composting toilets, water conserving plumbing systems, and organic gardens. Go on line and use Google to educate yourself on eco-friendly building practices and options.

I am madly in love with trees. My book, Naked in Eden, is full of my conversations with trees, and yet I am publishing a book that requires the use of trees. Fortunately my publisher, Health Communications, Inc. (HCI) has joined with the National Arbor Day Foundation and they created a program in which HCI donates \$1 to the Arbor Day Foundation for every tree they use in printing their books, which was at least 1 million dollars in 2007. They also print on paper that is a percentage recycled. All their returns are un-bound and sold for a small fee to a recycling company. I am very proud of HCI for taking these steps.