

Introduction:

Our therapeutic, ecological and self-sufficiency community, called 'Atlantis', previously resident on an offshore Irish island, had been living in Colombia for six years when I started writing these reports. The earlier history, activities and attitudes of the community, which was founded in London in 1970, can be found in the many books we have written, now available on: www.deunantbooks.com We welcome correspondence at: atlantiscol@hotmail.com

GREEN LETTER No. 1 from COLOMBIA Jan. 1995

From Jenny James

An Open Letter to the Green Movements of Europe

The region we're living in is called El Pato, which is the only mountainous area of the Province of Caquetá, S.E. Colombia, and as such is of great importance for the provision of water to lower-lying settlements and contains some of the water sources which flow to the Amazon basin.

This area is one of "invasión" as they say in Spanish, that is, there is no such thing as a population indigenous to Caquetá, except for the few remaining Indian groups. Everyone you meet here is from somewhere else in Colombia and most people haven't been here very long. And practically everyone is engaged in some form of illegal activity, mainly wood cutting and opium poppy-growing. The government pretends to ban these (to please the U.S.), but doesn't. £5 to a policeman will get a lorry-load of wood through, and the occasional toxic aerial spraying by air by the government, - a 'solution' which kills **everything** around and damages people - is the government's absurd way of sorting out the poppy problem.

The fact that there are no real "Caqueteños" - people born here - means two things:

1. it is a very friendly region (everyone is "in it" together) - no police, army or government law; it is a Zona Roja - Red Zone - where the guerrilla rule (reasonably well) and
2. that practically no-one gives a damn about the wreckage they are causing to the environment, the forested mountains, the animals living in them, and the water that flows from them. Practically no-one grows food crops of any kind. What vegetables there are arrive from Bogota, the capital of Colombia. Everyone thinks we are wonderful for growing a few lettuces and some spinach and blackberries.

In this most unlikely of environments where trees are crashing to the ground every day and where there were **300** avalanches to cross on the only road the day we came into the region (13th July, 1994) because of erosion, the only Green Party in Colombia has just been formed. It was conceived the day I

came in, unbeknown to me at the time, because 3 children died that night in their sleep, their hut swept away by one of the avalanches and one Eduardo Rincon, now Green Party representative on the local council (in San Vicente del Caguán), said “That's enough. We have to do something,” and formed his party. He was at the time arranging to have a helicopter flown into the region with food as nothing could get in by road.

The long and the short of it is, that he, I, and several other dedicated people are putting all our personal monies, time and energy into attempting to do something radical, rapid and visible in this region with the perhaps utopian determination to make it a model example of what **can** be done in a catastrophic situation. Apart from showing people by practical example how to grow vegetables and live organically and ecologically, my own part I hope to be the following: -

I want to interest Green Groups in Europe in this project so that their involvement with saving the Amazon forests becomes more personal and direct, and therefore, hopefully, will generate lots of energy and optimism amongst the people here. I know from being on the European end how depressingly huge and intangible the whole rainforest issue can seem, however much one wants to help. And I know from working with the people here that they feel totally isolated: they were *amazed* to hear that there's any such thing as a Green Movement in Europe or that anyone cares. These are in the main completely ordinary campesinos – poor peasants - who have most of them earned their living by **cutting forest**, but now, forced to see and live with the results of this activity, have undergone a change of consciousness. I feel passionate about not letting this strong spark die and to this end want to beg for the following:

1. Correspondence from any Green Groups in Europe, specifically letters of caring, support, and encouragement, for the people here. I will translate everything that arrives.
2. Visits from anyone who is willing to come out and see and **touch** the problem, and talk to the people here (I'll act as interpreter where needed). We are in a position to arrange hospitality – (vegetarian) food and simple rustic, but cosy accommodation.
3. Financial aid, however small, for specific projects which visitors can see, get involved with and check on. For example: £1,000 (English pounds) can save thousands of acres of virgin forest by purchasing an “entry area” into ownerless forest lands - and banning the entry of anyone through it. **This works** - we have purchased a belt with our own money and local people are loath to fight with us, as they value our presence. Such lands could be in the name of the Green Party and looked after by them. It is a very real way of stopping the advance of the chainsaw. Another excellent use of funds is to help set up small local projects to give people an alternative to slaying trees. Eduardo Rincon, the Green Councillor has a list of ideas and would talk to anyone who wants to help. Local people have told me how they would like to set up a cane-sugar processing plant (sugar-cane grows as easily as grass here, yet the local people go to town to buy ‘panela’ – brown block cane-sugar). These would be self-perpetuating projects, with some of the proceeds going towards creating more “Green” activities.

The smallest amount of European money goes a very long way here. All projects and use of money, reliability of the Green people involved, etc., can be checked upon by the direct contact method suggested and would in any case be under constant vigilance by us here.

All questions, queries, doubts, suggestions, please send to:

Jenny James, El Movimiento Verde, Apartado Aéreo 895, Neiva, Huila, Colombia, South America.

Visitors can turn up at any time without announcement. Get yourself to **Neiva**, the capital town of the Department of **Huila**. Then a Cotranshuila bus to **Rovira**, Caquetá. (Rovira is a tiny hamlet, just a few shacks on the 'main road' – a dirt track – don't blink or fall asleep, else you'll miss it!) Then a 3 hour uphill exhausting walk to our forest farm - ask for the "finca de los gringos" (the name donated all foreigners unfortunately – equivalent to 'Yankees') and you will most definitely need a guide. Then we will look after you and take you to visit all the relevant people and places. Heavy luggage can be left in Rovira at the Tienda "El Escorpion" of Ricardo. This is safe (tested and tried). We will collect it later by mule.

Please reproduce this letter and pass it on to other green groups that you know of.

Administration costs of any money sent: guaranteed **NIL!** We run on passion and **fear!**

GREEN LETTER No. 2, 1ST February 1995

Second letter from the province of Caquetá to the Green movements of Europe

I am an Englishwoman living and working with the nascent Green movement in Caqueta, South East Colombia, South America.

It is breathtakingly depressing. It is one thing to hear of the destruction of beautiful forests and jungles when one is in Europe - that is bad enough. It is quite another to hear the gnashing and grating of a chainsaw ringing in one's ears daily, gritting one's own teeth against the inevitable terrible thud that makes me and the earth shudder as another irreplaceable giant crashes to the ground. Or to walk for days on end in direct overhead sun with one's whole body crying out for the relief of shade and water as one crosses yet another dried-up streamlet.

The elation, then, of meeting people - an ex-travelling salesman, a Green councillor, ordinary *campesinos* (peasants), a retired police officer - full of the urgent desire to re-educate, reforest, redirect, turn the tide of destruction. And the ensuing crushing depression as one watches them drown in a sea of bureaucracy and despair, impotent through lack of funds or help. I put my hope in these passionate, simple, caring people. Yet they are putting their hope in me. I am European, and for them European means money, intelligence, help.

But I left my country, England, forever in disgust 20 years ago, to seek and find the "natural world". Now I have found the 'natural' world, and it is bleeding, screaming. I am over 50 years old, and travelling

around the hot, flat lands of Southern Caquetá where the great rivers are half the size they were a few years ago, and where the only wild animals one sees are stuck on people's walls as trophies, and I am making vegetable gardens for anyone who will let me. It is entirely pathetic: people stare in wonder and admiration because I clean up plastic waste, collect organic matter to form compost, grow a few lettuces. All around is enough land to feed the whole region on vegetables, but instead it feeds cattle to be slaughtered for the rich, fat city people. I am not even an expert gardener. By profession, I am a linguist and psychotherapist. And I am cracking up with what I see.

I have an idea. I always hated giving money to charity, thinking what horrible bureaucrat is going to waste this? Yet financial aid is the most obvious, the most rapid and the most potent thing that the average concerned European can give. My idea, as I described in Green Letter No. 1, is that Green groups in Europe should "adopt" small local projects here, keeping in direct personal contact with the problems and the progress, completely bypassing all government interference and control, visiting whenever you like, receiving hospitality on our farms and with local communities who are trying to reverse the terrible tide of false "development" that is engulfing them. I asked the initiator of one local group to write something for me to translate. Here it is:

January 28th 1995

Vereda La Union No. 2

Caquetá, Colombia (NB: Not a postal address).

To anyone who wants to help:

The hamlet called "La Union" is one of 22 settlements which comprise the region of El Pato, better known as part of the headlands from which spring the waters of the "lungs of the World", (i.e.: the Amazon basin).

This settlement consists of more or less an 8 kilometre radius and has a well-constructed community action group (Junta de ACCION COMUNAL). We want to you to know that the colony is new and that not more than 10 hectares have of the forest have been opened up, and that the desire of this whole community is not to cut down any more forest, and in order not to do this, we want to start a communal project of making cane sugar (panela: blocks of unrefined brown sugar used everywhere in this part of the world). In addition to this, we want to turn this settlement into an exemplary model of an organic farm.

We are sufficiently organised to boast a primary school, a communal pharmacy and legal status ("personeria juridica" - required by the Colombian government before you can legally breathe!), but are simple people of scant resources to proceed further. Our planned projects would benefit everyone as we are totally committed to preserve nature, the water, the flora and fauna, as we are a group of people who have understood that to deforest further is to destroy ourselves and to protect nature is to protect ourselves.

Signed:

Fernando Zapata, President of the community action group, "La Union", North Caquetá, Colombia.

I struggled up the hour-long mountain path to La Union one night with two of my kids, barefoot as the deep mud made shoes useless. The mudslide is caused by years of mule-trains lugging blocks of newly felled wood down to the road for now-illegal transportation (the police are glad it's illegal - it means automatic bribes for them to get the stuff through). I slept on bare boards in the cold mountain air in a bachelor shack and awoke to a magnificent sight: we were at the flat top of this particular mountain range and watched the brilliant sun rising over rolling forests below. Our host was a young member of the newly formed Green Party of El Pato. All around us were giant trees. Horizontal.

"Er, what do you live from?" I asked. "Cutting wood," came the sincere reply. Then he added: "You must understand that we have only very recently become conscious of what we are doing, and we need help to change to planting crops to earn our living."

I understood. I hope you do too. Please duplicate and distribute this letter and communicate with us at the address in Green Letter No. 1.

Jenny James

Contact address in Ireland:

Rebecca Garcia, An Droichead Beo, Burtonport, Co. Donegal.

GREEN LETTER No. 3, 18th March 1995

Atlantis Farm, Caqueta, Colombia

3rd letter to the Green movements of Europe

Dear Becky, Earthwatch, Friends of the Earth, the Green Party of Ireland, John Barron,

Your letter of 8th March, Becky, about your meeting with the Green Party of Ireland, has just arrived and has made two women and a bunch of children very happy indeed. Thank you all you people whose names I don't know for your generous and immediate support for our cry from Colombia. I have said for months to the "Green" people here: "Look, I have no power to make anyone in Europe help. All I can do is to give you a voice, put words to what is happening, send my letter to the winds via my daughter, Becky, and see what happens. All I know is that there are lots of people in Europe who *care* and who desperately want to do *something*, and who don't know *what* to do."

Your report of your first meeting, Becky, gives us so much enthusiasm to keep going. I hope by now you received my letter No. 2, written in the hot flat-lands of Caquetá, where I journeyed for several weeks till I was as blank, as flat, as dry and depressed as the hellish countryside I was looking at. I talked with everyone and anyone - an old man trying to start a Green group in his little riverside-town; the principal of an agricultural college who wanted to create some sense of caring in his students; housewives; peasant women; a boat owner; a black Kenyan missionary priest; a crippled Indian running a centre to teach crafts to landless Indians in Leguizamo in the province of Putumayo.

I travelled on cargo boats down the sluggish, contaminated, half-empty rivers of Caquetá - a dozen times I had to get out of the boat and help to push or pull it when it got stuck on sandbanks. Once we were stuck for two days. These rivers are the “roads” of Caquetá and each year the water level goes down and down in the dry season, till transport is practically at a standstill. I wanted to get a boat down the Putumayo River to Amazonas province, but was told there could be no movement of boats “till the rains come” – in May. This was February. And what will happen when the rains no longer come?

I travelled the long way back home, through unbearably hot, airless, insect-ridden, treeless landscapes, back to our little mountain farm where it is cool and green and we are surrounded by trees. It is an illusion of peace and safety and health. But I needed that illusion! My soul could take no more. I knew one thing from my travels: it is too late for those flatlands. Cattle have taken over, money has taken over; coca (to make cocaine) rules. But it is definitely not too late for this last little range of mountain forest where we live, even though I arrived home to a smoke-laden atmosphere: it is burning time on the farms of Caquetá. I took a firm hold on myself: “Right, Jenny, you definitely do not need to see any more. The end of the world is real, right on your doorstep. You'd better grow as many carrots as possible.”

Translated, this means I am only one small woman, with a facility for running rather successful little organic farms; and this I shall do. Because if I go “out there” anymore, I'll go barmy. I have gathered a list of contacts throughout Caquetá, little nascent, unhappy Green groups or individuals struggling in these last days to STOP the horror that is happening. I write to them and try to imbue them with a sense of hope I often don't feel. Now your news comes, Becky, news that tells me that people over there *do* care, and I'll translate this news and send it flying to the people and places where it will matter most. And I will keep on growing those carrots to show people earth actually produces food - something they seem to have forgotten round here; and that it's possible to leave *some* trees growing on cow pasture and not to strip the whole mountainside. And the children will continue to march off when the fires are nearby to complain with tears and indignation about the burning to uncomprehending farm-workers who stare and smile because they don't know how to handle this strange interruption of their usual routine.

And I repeat again our offer to house, feed, help and inform any “Green” people who feel the incentive to come and assess the situation in this little corner of Colombia, with a view to doing something concrete to help those who care.

Love and gratitude to you, unknown friends,

Jenny

(and Anne and 8 kids aged 9 - 17)

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Local Green Party banned by FARC

...but Green Campaigning gets under way

Beginning of our Green Theatre

The farm project blooms and spreads..

Green Letter No. 4, 2nd August 1995

Dear Green People in Europe,

We have just received our latest load of 'Green' post from Europe - because of our rural situation, this only occurs once a month or less. Also, for the first time in months, someone arrived from our supporting commune in Tolima with a little bit of money so we can afford postage to send out a big THANKYOU.

THANKYOU **Becky and Magdalena** in Ireland for your heart-warming enthusiasm and endless energy, your exciting letters and your co-ordination of all contacts.

THANKYOU **Nestor Ocampo** for taking the Colombian message to Germany and Ireland.

THANKYOU '**BUND**' (a German environmental group) for enabling Nestor to go to Europe.

THANKYOU **Steve Thompson** of Sheffield for your brilliant work in obtaining us free seeds - and thankyou **Unwins Seeds** for your generous offer!

And thankyou all the people who have written offering help or wanting to visit - I will write individually to you all.

News from Colombia - to be used discreetly please - contains the stresses of any campaign in troubled waters.

The guerrilla force which rules the countryside in many parts of Colombia has **banned**, if you please, the Green Party. This is not as catastrophic as it sounds as they have **not** banned 'green work', in fact are supporting it, doing their own best to educate the country people regarding preservation, and have prohibited further forest cutting in certain key areas. It seems the ban results from political jealousies and intrigues, and is nothing to do with ecological ideas, which they loudly applaud. They have given us a complete green light, excuse pun, to go ahead with our projects! but are severely questioning the political motivations of our figurehead, Eduardo Rincon, our elected Green Councillor. This puts us in a schizophrenic position which I will worry about privately and not bother you with! This is Colombia, *ergo* all things are possible, both excellent and atrocious.

On the practical front, I have received a touching letter from the president of our 'model' community several hours' journey from here, Fernando Zapata of the La Union settlement, who says that his little hamlet have set up a community 'huerta' - vegetable garden. I gave him seeds for this, and have more waiting. Eduardo Rincon reports that in spite of the above bumps, his work on the San Vicente council (the capital town of this department) is going well; he has also managed to obtain a Government grant to get a study of the flora and fauna of this area done by experts - a ghastly waste of money in his opinion and ours, but unfortunately it's the official way to get things done. All you actually need is £5 for a long busride along this valley to see the problem: hills deforested nearly to the top. I've also recently heard news that the Colombian Government have **banned** any further logging and that therefore all the tortured mules in this area (used for dragging enormous blocks of wood of the forests) are up for sale at very cheap prices. This needs confirmation, I'll get excited when I believe it, but I must say I haven't heard the heart-sinking sound of lorries down on the valley road trundling night and day with their tragic cargo for some time. (We're three hours up the mountain, but certain air conditions send these depressing sounds to us) Living so far away, it's quite possible you in Europe may get this type of news before us - do let us know!

On the farm here, we have lived for months without money, and very well, as our intensive organic vegetable garden and our manure factory - that is, a huge enclosure full of sexy guineapigs who oblige by mating night and day - supply us with excellent food. We have also raised a magnificent brood of children, from a variety of parents, who have been brought up exclusively in a pre-20th century rural environment,

many of whom are now approaching an age of choice - early teens - and all of whom, after trips into urban-landia, have chosen unequivocally to remain in the mountains and use their art, their music, their acting talents and their hard work to promote green work, which in our case mainly means providing a living, working, visit-able example of non-noxious country life. All of these children performed stunningly in a Green wordless dance-, mime- and music play I invented for them which was shown to a huge audience at the local school.

We are starting to 'over-produce' deliberately, so that we can take fresh vegetables - unheard of in the countryside! - for sale, barter and giving away to neighbours, local settlements and villages. This is excellent propaganda, and people are touchingly impressed and show an unexpected openness to being taught how to use such 'exotic' items as water-cress and kale. We pay for all personal favours, such as the loan of mules, gifts of sugar-cane seed, or collecting our post, with celery, lettuce, lemons; and more depressingly, with gifts of local ethnic perpetual foods such as the *guatila*, which are unknown in this newly-colonised area, whereas in Tolima, where we have another farm, the many, many varieties of easily-grown 'Indian' crops are still well-known, if often despised as 'pig-food' by better-off *campesinos*. How strange to be showing Colombians how to cook tasty excellent perpetual (self-propagating) ethnic food-plants.

Having coped (after just one year on this farm) with our own food-needs, we are now branching out to tree-seeding, that is, nurseries for baby trees which we will offer free to anyone willing to replant. This is only symbolic because of the scale we are operating on - but we can only be as big as we are. The message travels even when the seeds don't, and there is absolutely no hostility regarding what we are saying, though of course often there is a quiet, patronising incomprehension, as in, "But there are so many trees everywhere - look! We're tired of seeing them!"

My gardens are calling - we have to plant every day double what we eat to keep going - so I will close with an invitation to anyone, anywhere to visit without announcement; to write; or to communicate with our Irish group, c/o my daughter Rebecca Garcia, An Droichead Beo (The Living Bridge), Burtonport, Co. Donegal, Eire or c/o our Colombian representative Magdalena Lasprilla living on our sailing boat The Atlantis Adventure, c/o Baltimore P.O, County Cork, S. Ireland.

PS In answer to all correspondents who ask what they can do if financial help is beyond them, here are some of our needs:

We need information from anyone who knows about seed production. We find ourselves totally ignorant as to how to reproduce European vegetables. At the moment, we are assuming that these crops need a

winter – and we can't provide one! - or that there is some involved scientific process that we wouldn't be able to handle. Is this correct please, all you educated ones in the know?!

Stationery is a problem - an emotional one knowing that even this paper was once a tree - and a technical one as we live without money. The above address in Burtonport, and another in London obtainable from Becky, act as collection points for material gifts, and anyone travelling to us, please always contact Becky first if you are able to bring stuff here. We need: typing, writing and drawing paper, airmail paper, end envelopes, any 'green' visual materials for schools; manual typewriter ribbons, correcting fluid and solvent for same; carbon paper; pencils, biros, colouring materials; small gardening utensils; seeds, including herbs and flowers; simple first-aid gear; basic toilet goods; simple cotton clothes, all ages; wools for knitting; creative learning toys; sensible shoes all sizes; homeopathic treatment for farm animals (cows, horses, rabbits); natural fibre materials for making and mending, e.g. old sheets and pillow-slips; Vaseline and Lanolin for home remedies; copies of 'Donde No Hay Doctor' (Where There Is No Doctor); pins, needles, threads and all basic sewing gear; any tools, however old-fashioned and even if they need mending; early reading materials, English and Spanish. In fact - you name it, we can use it! (except electrical gear or anything that runs on batteries)

Finally, if anyone does want to make a donation, however small, this will be added to a fund to save the next bit of forested mountain. It can be sent to **Mary Kelly**, who has been with us 15 years, via Lloyds Bank to the Banco Anglo-Colombiano, Bogotá, Colombia. You will need to mention her Cedula No. (Identification Card): 256982; and Irish Passport No. M631462. We are completely happy for anyone to follow up on the final destination of their donation.

If anyone would like to see any particular aspect of life here dealt with in these letters, please let us know.

Blessings to you all, and thankyou,

Jenny James, compañeros and children

Address: Caquetá Rainforest Campaign , AA 895, NEIVA,

HUILA, Colombia, South America

Contents:

How the FARC act as local policemen in domestic country life

Mentality of the 'colonos'

A visit from the local FARC commander to admire our gardens..

GREEN LETTER FROM COLOMBIA, No. 5, September 1995

Caquetá Rainforest Campaign

Postal Address: AA 895, NEIVA

HUILA, Colombia, South America

Hello Good Greenfolk of Ireland, England and the rest of Europe,

Once again, a heartfelt 'thankyou' for all the energetic responses to our project out here, especially to: Georgina of Scotland; Steve and Cynthia of Sheffield; B&Q seeds and Unwins seeds and to the Henry Doubleday Research Association. Readers may be interested to know that approx. 95% of our letters of encouragement and help come from women, most of whom are engaged in projects of their own. Also from some *wonderful* men!

Has anyone noticed that if they put energy into an original, effective project that, sure enough, along come the detractors? We have heard that, according to the leader of an Irish environmental group, we are really "collecting money for the Colombian guerrilla fighters." I'd like to answer this one, as it has relevant and interesting bearing on our local campaign. Firstly, the FARC guerrillas in Colombia are well-financed - my somewhat puritanical left-wing mentality was jolted to see long painted finger-nails on the female guerrilleras and extremely non-campesino aspects to the male guerrilleros. More importantly, I'd like to tell some anecdotes about their *civilian* role in country life here, as this may prove extremely important to the 'Green' issue later.

Colombia is two countries, the town and the countryside. The gulf is enormous. Most parts of the countryside are run by guerrilla forces, except in very rich regions, which the Army or extremely violent para-military groups patrol. The FARC (communist guerrilla force) is the largest, oldest and

best-organised. They are in the main extremely disciplined, coherent and highly-principled. What is little known about them abroad or in the towns, is the following: in the absence of any government, police or other authority, help or recourse for the peasants in the country areas, they act as an extremely effective and completely respected civil authority, somewhere between your local bobby and the council marriage-guidance advisors. Specific examples:

I am struggling up the steep three-hour incline from the nearest village to our farm. My very pregnant neighbour is coming down. Later on the path, her husband, shepherded by my Colombian son-in-law and another male neighbour. Later still, I ascertain that the neighbour has, as usual, been beating up his wife. The wife appealed to the guerrilla force - this is customary - and the husband is 'called up' by them to appear with her before them. If he refuses, he will be tied and brought down anyway. He is publicly shamed and sentenced to a short period working on rural roadways.

Example two: Saturday night in Rovira, the local 'village' (a few roadside shacks and bars): Colombian sport No. 1 is in progress - the local men get drunk on the cheap beer, wearing their machetes and sometimes even loaded guns; then they pick fights, and every weekend, someone ends up seriously slashed or with life-endangering shot-wounds. The guerrilla imposes various penalties, hold meetings - compulsory attendance of 100% of the population - issue warnings. The sport continues. So now they have: banned the carrying of weapons in bars; banned the the selling of more than two bottles of beer per person; imposed an 11.00 p.m. curfew (normally Colombian starting-time). I was amazed at local reaction: it was *applauded*, even by an alcoholic neighbour who said, 'Thank goodness, because once I start, I can't stop.' The drink-sellers are not pleased of course, but that's only a couple of people.

Why all this in a 'Green' letter? Well, can you imagine the results if the FARC should embrace wholeheartedly the 'Green' issue?

I realise that in pacifist, non-Colombian, urban left or right-wing circles, these sentiments may cause waves of shock-horror. However, I am reporting on Colombian reality, which includes these facts: these mountains are being aggressively deforested by rough-and-ready, good-natured but desensitised brawling 'colonos' (settlers); and two, The FARC guerrilla force are an educated, polite, firm restraining influence upon them, whilst at the same time having their economic and cultural interests deeply at heart. Our own position on the FARC is that they are gentler and more respectful than any Army road-stop you will meet, but we can't go along with the very natural Third World communist desire for development-at-all-costs, because we know too well what that cost is.

We will be happy to engage in detail with anyone who wants to correspond on these issues, and of course, as always, we repeat our open invitation to visit and see for yourself; this would cost only

the fare to Colombia, as we will take care of food and accommodation (as long as you are happy to be vegetarian and non-smoking for the duration).

On other issues: my daughter Rebecca who runs our support-house in Ireland, is thinking of getting Eduardo Rincon, our Green councillor for this region, over to Europe. If any groups would be interested in having him as their guest, please contact Becky at: An Droichead Beo, Burtonport, Co. Donegal, Ireland. Eduardo is a lively, charismatic man of 40, but he doesn't have a word of English; however, Spanish interpreters should be easy to come by.

Steve Thompson and Cynthia Dickinson, of Sheffield and Wakefield - contact address: 111 Highcliffe Road, Sheffield S11 7LQ, England - have very kindly set up a bank account for the CAQUETA RAINFOREST CAMPAIGN; the idea is to cheat the banks of their absurd money-transfer fees by collecting money first in England, for bringing or sending over here. Every penny of this money will be used directly to purchase the *forested peaks of mountain ranges* in this area - the most sensitive and ecologically important parts (and, tragically, often the only bits left as the chain-saw men march relentlessly peak-wards). At risk of depressing you all, this is how it works: all untouched forestlands belong to *no-one*. *But* anyone can move in, cut down several hectares of trees, apply to a Government organisation and get title to whatever land they have 'worked'. The teeth-gnashing irony of this situation is, then, that the only way to save the forest is to buy out the 'colonos', more specifically the ones who are starting to de-forest very high up.

Ultimately, of course, a change in consciousness is required, but while we're working on that, we'd better save the trees, or there'll be nothing left to be 'conscious' about. In our favour is the fact that roughly 0% of Colombians want to live in or near the forest! They come in only to make 'quick' money, and are completely delighted to get out - i.e. back to the towns - if we make this financially possible for them. There is also, as indicated in my earlier 'Green Letters', a rapidly increasing body of people who are aware that the chop-and-burn mentality doesn't work, but who don't - yet - feel in a position to change their lifestyle. Hence the importance of our example. It is a fact of Third-World life that Europeans, whatever our disgusting record in the colonies has been, are looked up to and our opinions respected. Our lifestyle and ideas, which in large parts of Western society would be looked upon as crankish, utopian, 'drop-out' or weird, is here viewed with wonderment and interest. We don't have to argue about whether or not you can let trees grow in cow pasture fields; we just do it; or whether the solid, steep, orange-clay land can grow masses of beautiful vegetables with the right digging and compost: they can see for themselves.

Which reminds me, I've some gardening to do. Goodbye, and a million thanks to all our correspondents,

Till next letter,

Jenny James,

Rovira, Caquetá, Colombia (not a postal address)

21st September 1995

PS to Green Letter No. 5

One day after writing Green letter No. 5, something rather important happened.

Yesterday, I was visited by the FARC Commander for this region. He told me that the day previously he had called a meeting in our local village Rovira, in which they discussed with the local people the fact that forest cutting has to *stop*; to which end, rather than waiting eternally for Government help to change to other forms of farming, they were going to begin a programme of communal vegetable gardens with “technical help” from the gringos (that's us).

He walked admiringly around my gardens (suddenly all I could see were the mistakes - yellowing transplants where we'd used too-fresh compost etc...), took some examples - fine giant 'spring' onions and coriander, a disgusting herb which is universally popular in Colombia, and a large selection of seeds. Today at his behest I am to write a booklet in Spanish explaining the cultivation, care and use of each type of vegetable, many of which are unknown here - for example, the humble radish. Once experimental gardens have been started, I am to go down to give 'technical advice'. I wish I could convey to you how this sounds to me; for although I have spent many years gardening, I have never read a gardening book in my life - it would bore me to tears - and the idea of writing a vegetable manual is about as attractive to me as going to clean the toilets in the bus station at Neiva. However, sometimes we are called upon to perform these menial services in the greater cause of preserving the world's oxygen supply. If there are any *real* gardeners out there and not just imposters like me, would they please fly to my side and help!

All the best, JJ

Contents: The murder of Luis Arenas

Green Letter No. 6

This 'Green' letter comes to you edged thickly in black.

I have just received the news that my friend and colleague in the tiny emerging green movement of S.E. Colombia, LUIS ERASMO ARENAS HURTADO has been murdered. He was the only person in Lower Caquetá - the hot, flat, destroyed land that lies below our mountain range - who was doing any significant Green work.

Luis was 62 years old, strong and healthy. Ironically for me, he was a Conservative, an ex-police officer, a straight, firm, determined, highly educated man. His crime: efficiency in leadership of green community work in the little river port of Milán, Caquetá, and the massive surrounding coca-growing area.

Three hours before his death, Luis wrote to me, telling me he was now President of the Association of Community Action groups (Juntas Comunes) in his area and very busy working on the issue of crop substitution, that is, teaching people alternatives to growing coca; reforestation, and concentration on rubber-production. He was delighted to hear that members of the Irish green Party might want to visit and offered his home 'unconditionally' to anyone who comes. (This offer remains open with his family)

He then left his house to visit some friends. At 8.15 p.m. an unknown man (a 'sicario' - hired killer) entered the room with a machine-gun and filled Luis with 19 bullets. He died instantly.

His wife, my friend Dolly Arenas, fled from Milán. His large family of sisters and brothers fear for their lives. Days before his death, Luis had written to the Mayor of Florencia saying he had been threatened and asking for a transfer to continue his work elsewhere. The letter 'disappeared', then reappeared after his death.

Luis's death is an extraordinary blow to all things green in Lower Caquetá, as well as a huge sorrow personally to his family and friends. It means that the only person brave enough to try and stem the tide of get-rich quick environmental destruction in that huge region, has been wiped out, precisely because he was working effectively. It is obvious he would have been elected Mayor of Milán in the next local elections and that this could only increase his effectiveness.

And so to the huge question, *who* killed Luis? This is where my small English brain was in for a shock. 'The narcos', I naturally thought. Wrong. The guerrilla? Highly unlikely: they support all community work. The next sentence you're not supposed to say in Colombia (It's OK to kill people, but not to mention who did it). Everyone suspects that the present Mayor of Milán, one Ricardo Leyva of the Liberal Party, planned Luis's murder in conjunction with others. A reflection of the old political battles that caused the death of thousands in the Fifties' 'Violencia' in Colombia.

It seems the long-standing, self-seeking political club of Milán, seeing Luis was a clean, honest, ideological man, chose not to argue or compete but to resort to the 'easy' Colombian way of the gun. I see my task as making sure it doesn't turn out so easy, and that his green work does not get disrupted.

Much as they loved him, Luis's family feel scared, paralysed. They want something done, but they certainly don't want to risk the assassination of further members of the family. They don't dare to return to Milán and they have little faith in DAS (Security Police) investigations - there are tens of thousands of unpunished murders in Colombia. They brighten up enormously however when I say, "But I'm not afraid and nor will my friends be, and we intend to do something." They have a touching, almost disturbing faith in the "international community" whence, it seems, all magic emanates. Certainly, those who murdered Luis rely on this common Colombian terror, and they would never have suspected that Luis has foreign friends not prone to the understandable but paralysing Colombian disease of fear.

What they say they want is for 'investigators' to come in from outside and get something printed about Luis's death in a foreign newspaper, and that this report would then be picked up by the prestigious Conservative Colombian daily "El Tiempo." How this results in the assassins being apprehended, I don't quite understand, but will certainly work to get them what they want.

In conversations with the family, we have worked out some daring plans of action, which we will report after they have - hopefully – worked. A dangerous business maybe, but not as cancer-producing as cowering in fear.

So why are we communicating all this to a 'green' European audience?

Because the death of Luis is much bigger than Luis, great as he was. And busy as he was, his work was only a tiny drop in a great ocean of indifference and cynicism. The **only drop** in that enormous hot, flat area. Luis's death means all green work in Lower Caquetá stops. Unless we make it not stop! We must make sure that those who saw murder as the way to create SILENCE, find that what they have brought about is the most unholy NOISE.

PLEASE HELP US TO CREATE THIS NOISE!

1. By sending letters of condolence and support to Luis's family. His wife's name is Dolly Rendon Arenas, and one of his sisters is Beatriz Arenas. If you use our postbox, A.A. 895 Neiva, Huila, we will make sure all letters get passed to the family with translations attached.
2. If any of you have connections with Amnesty International, please ask for their advice and help in this matter.

3. If you have contacts with any newspapers or magazines, however small in circulation, and can get something printed, please do so and *send us a copy* so that we can try this mysterious route of 'international disapproval' to force the hand of the Colombian authorities who *should* already be doing something to do it.

4. If any of you are adventurous enough to want to come out here and to do something yourself - make concerned enquiries on the spot for example, brilliant! We will combine efforts and give all the support and advice we can.

One thing we can't do though; as Northern Europeans we could never live and work in hot flat Milán, an area at least two days' travel from our mountain range. That remains a loss which shows how great was the soul of Luis Erasmo Arenas Hurtado.

Please don't let his be yet another useless Colombian death.

It seems almost irreverent to end on a positive note, but Luis would be delighted: News from El Pato is that the guerrilla force have definitely put a stop to any more tree cutting! and that they are taking our vegetable-growing, seed-donation programme very seriously, sharing out the packets amongst the population and regularly checking up on them to see that they are using them well. All our presently available gift seeds are used up. We could distribute endless amounts: please send whatever you can!

Steve Thompson, Unwin's and B&Q seeds - thankyou!

Love to all,
Jenny James

What follows is a literal translation of an Open Letter from Luis Arenas' brother-in-law, Diogenes.

To Amnesty International and all International Organisations working for the Green cause, ecology, the environment and human rights:

In Colombia, to defend biodiversity, the environment, can mean death.

This has happened in the Department of Caquetá, a region situated in the Southeast of Colombia in the wet tropical jungles of the Amazon Basin.

There lived Luis Erasmo Arenas Hurtado, a community leader who took on the fight for the Green Cause, after observing how the cocaine-traffickers of the region pitilessly deforested the jungle, causing the rivers to dry up, filling the countryside with desolation and death.

And so, at the age of 62, he gave up a conformist life to organise the rural districts of Port Milan, a small town on the river Orteguaza. With the participation of the community, he worked out projects of rural electrification, reforestation of the basin of the River Orteguaza and the introduction of large quantities of fish-spawn into Lake Guaicochará. His dream was to bring back life and contentment to the inhabitants of the region. The fisherfolk would return to the river, rainfall would regulate itself, and with it, the harvests, the grain-stores would be full again and tranquillity would return to the region. The old people would have a place to rest in an old people's refuge Luis built on land he donated.

But then, dark designs of hate and violence truncated these dreams. On 5th August 1995, Luis's life was cut off in a treacherous and cowardly manner, simply for wanting to do good, for organising the community to prevent so much destruction. His death has its roots in a local government that has never been interested in satisfying the needs of the people; nor has it shown the slightest interest in punishing those responsible for this monstrous crime. Here in these latitudes, to be honest and conscious of the need to defend the environment is penalised with death, because such policies work against administrative corruption and complacency towards destruction of the jungle.

Luis Erasmo Arenas was killed by the indifference of the local government who, knowing that this community leader was in danger, nevertheless provided no protection for him; on the contrary, they left him on his own, thus ridding themselves of the control and supervision which the sacrificed leader would exercise over the activities of the administration. (see note below)*

Members of Luis Erasmo Arenas' family, his friends and all defenders of biodiversity in Caquetá, call upon the International Green Community to condemn this political crime and to continue to support Luis's ideals so that to defend Life in Colombia does not mean to lose one's life, and so that the flora and fauna become an expression of a healing bond amongst Colombians.

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* This is a reference to the fact that the Mayor of Milán and his group conveniently absented themselves on the day of Luis's murder. The day before he was killed, Luis was elected by the community to be overseer of a project for which the Mayor was granted £50,000 (a very large sum here). This would have stopped the usual stealing of funds.

Speech read at Luis's funeral by his brother-in-law, Diogenes, Translation followed by Spanish original

Florencia, Caquetá

Sadly and silently, our pain and rage bottled up inside, we - your wife, your children and all your brothers, sisters, relations and friends - have brought you here, Luis Erasmo Arenas Hurtado, to your final resting place.

A hand fossilized with fear cut short your amazing life.

A cruel, visionless mind put an end to your dreams.

But just as water is stronger than rock, love is stronger than violence.

The Arenas family will harbour no bitterness. Those who spilled your blood without pity are on the wrong path. They did not know that your parents, Don Erasmo Arenas Badillo and Mercedes Hurtado had already sown pathways of peace, joy and service to the community in all the valley of the River Orteguaza. The nobility of spirit inherited from your parents prevents the Arenas family from nurturing low passions in their hearts.

We know, Luis Erasmo, that a cunning hand cruelly slaughtered you in the autumn of your life, but we declare that for each bullet that shattered your bones, new flowers will bloom along the river, and the millions of baby fish that you planned to seed in the Lake of Guaicochara will feel your presence. Your projects to give warmth and shelter to the old people of Milan will not die. When the electrification of the local villages becomes a reality, your name will stand out clearly in everyone's memory.

In this final resting place, we hand over a life so that others can germinate. We are not here to say goodbye to you, my friend, we simply bring you to an unavoidable meeting, an encounter with eternity.

God will already have pardoned you for any sins and misunderstandings; in our memories will remain only the presence of a community leader, of the son who returned to his land to follow in the footsteps of your parents by continuing the cultivation of the seeds of love they left behind them.

Luis Erasmo, rest in peace and forgive from your lofty kingdom your murderers. Do not forget you are an Arenas and from the heavens, side by side with your parents, help us to build the peace which all us Caquetenos are crying out for.

To build joy, one needs far more courage than to deal out death.

Rest in peace, brother.

October 18th 1995 Colombia

Tristes y silenciosos, con el dolor y la rabia apurando por dentro, Luis Erasmo Arenas Hurtado; tu esposa, tus hijos, todos tus hermanos parientes y amigos te hemos traído al “*lugar para siempre*”. Una mano fosilizada de miedo segó tu vida asombrosa.

Una mente cruel y sin esperanzas trunco tus sueños.

Y así como el agua puede más que la roca, el amor es más poderoso que la violencia. Los Arenas no abrigarán ningún rencor. Quienes regaron sin piedad tu sangre, equivocaron el camino, ellos ignoran que Don Erasmo Arenas Badillo y Mercedes Hurtado, tus padres; habrían sembrado senderos de paz, alegría y servicios a la comunidad por todo el valle del río Orteguaza.

La nobleza heredada de tus padres, le impide a los Arenas, abrigar en sus corazones las bajas pasiones.

Sabemos Luis Erasmo, que una mano artera se ensaña con tu otoñal humanidad, pero lo contrario de toda verdad, es también verdadero, por eso desde ahora lo pregonamos, de cada impacto que estremeció tus huesos, brotarán nuevas flores en el río y los millones de alevinos que querías sembrar en la laguna de Guaicochará sentirán los caprichos de tu presencia.

No morirán tus proyectos de darles calor a los ancianos de Milán. Cuando la electrificación de las veredas sea una realidad tu nombre emergerá con vigor desde lo profundo de la memoria.

En este lugar de siempre, entregamos una vida para que germine otra. No venimos a decirte adiós amigo, te traemos a la cita obligatoria, al encuentro con la eternidad.

Dios ya te ha perdonado los yerros e incomprensiones; en nuestros recuerdos quedará la presencia del líder comunitario, del hijo que retornó a su tierra para seguir los pasos de la siembra y la semillas de amor dejadas por sus padres.

Luis Erasmo, descansa en paz y perdona desde lo más alto de tu reino a tus victimarios. No te olvides de tu condición de Arenas y edifica desde el cielo al lado de tus padres la paz que clamamos los caqueteños.

Para construir la alegría se necesita mucho más valor que para propiciar la muerte.

Descansa en paz amigo.

October 18th 1995 Colombia

Contents of Green Letter No. 7:

Tree slaughter at Ricardo's

FARC policy on drug crops

Statement of our own attitudes to drug addicts

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GREEN LETTER No. 7, 13th December 1995

CAQUETÁ RAINFOREST CAMPAIGN,

Postal Address: AA 895

Neiva, Huila, Colombia

Dear Friends in Europe,

My last letter brought you news of the murder of my friend and colleague Luis Arenas. Your response has been magnificent. Many people have written personal letters, simple, strong and eloquent, to his wife and family. These letters are tremendously valued: please don't think it is too late to write. Everything except death and destruction moves very slowly in Colombia; every drop of positivity coming our way is deeply appreciated: a word, a feeling, a packet of seeds, a small donation, a letter of caring. **Nick Osborne** of England sent out SEVENTY-SEVEN well-written press releases about the situation here - that is one example. But it is not about Luis I want to write today, until I have very concrete news from this end.

My preoccupation today is trees. Not surprising, considering the nature of this campaign. But these are some very particular trees, belonging to our nearest neighbour, trees that we hoped would one day belong to us if we could raise the money to buy his farm. Now it is too late. I am typing to blot out the sound of the chainsaw next door.

Yesterday morning I spent transplanting some baby nitrogen-fixing trees I had grown from seed; my 10 year old daughter Katie spent the morning filling little bags with compost and planting local tree seeds in them. By midday we were very tired (our day starts at 5.00 a.m.) and I lay on my 'log', the beautiful fallen body of some ancient giant - this one died a natural death. It is there I rest and think and plan and regain strength.

Then came a terrible crash, then another immediately, another and another. I jumped up in horror. Ricardo's farm. He has been waiting to sell to us as long as we've been here, but the £4,000 asking price was beyond us. Now, he claims, someone has offered £6,000. His farm is 500 acres, most of it beautiful high forested mountain. But the bit below us, he is clearing. He plants maize to hide the real crop: amapola, opium poppy. He does not replant cleared land, because he is not interested in living on his land or making compost - a ridiculous idea to him. He simply cuts down the next bit of beautiful forest, ready 'composted' by Nature herself - it will last him one year. And then on to the next bit.

In spite of all the good news about the guerrilla force preventing large logging operations, these 'small' - over an acre will be cleared this morning - operations do not come under the ban. In Europe, you will

hear negative reports of the Colombian guerrilla force 'supporting' drug-trafficking - the latest phrase coined is 'narcoguerrilla'. The actual situation is very different: the guerrilla supports the peasants. If the Colombian government responds to American pressure and sends in planes to spray crops with lethal pesticides, or sends the Army in to bully the population, needless to say, the guerrilla cannot support such aggression and is therefore seen to be on the side of the coca or poppy-growers, whereas in reality they preach against these things and encourage change to other crops. What they won't do is use force against their own people to prevent the growing of illegal crops.

Nor can I. I feel impotent, legless. The trees are crashing. Ricardo is overweight, he is not a poor peasant, he owns a discotheque down in Rovira. And he is a friend. He has waited two years for us to buy that land; we didn't have the money for a postage stamp.

Outside the sun is shining, it is an exquisite morning, fresh from the night's gentle rain. Officially it is the dry season, but as we live so close to the forest, we often have rainfall that twenty minutes down the deforested mountain they do not have. So our gardens stay fresh and green all the year round, whilst elsewhere it is parched. The farmers don't mind, they use this season for burning the fields and woods. Ricardo will be burning soon, when the chainsaw man has done his work.

When we first heard those fatal thuds yesterday, Ned (a permanent member of our community) and my children ran down to see what was going on, and to try and persuade Ricardo to stop. But our position is untenable. We cannot make Ricardo feel what he does not feel. He wants money to go and live in Bogotá. To us, Bogotá is synonymous with Hell, but that's what Third world campesinos (country-dwellers) want.

I am writing to you to stop my world caving in, to try and find hope and steadiness and common sense. I lay with Alice (12) last night, she was desolate after having watched the trees fall. All I could think about was that in many parts of the world, it wouldn't be trees that were falling next door, but people. As I lie with her, I remember the pains that my own mother went through trying to protect me from the unfaceable realities and cruelties of life.

Then I lay awake half the night wondering if there is anything in this disheartening situation that can be done, given that money can't be magicked out of thin air. Here are some suggestions I have come up with which I now throw out to the green network to see if any of you have the contacts or resources necessary:

1. Although there is no electricity in this area, Ricardo has a generator-run video machine. I am wondering if any anti-drugtaking institutions have videos available showing the effects, perhaps on young people, of this pretty-looking flower they grow round here: the opium-poppy. Likewise, videos which bring home the global effects of cutting these forests. Whether a gift or a loan, any material of this nature, and most especially if it could be dubbed in Spanish, would be well-used. I would personally see to it that it was shown all over the region. Betamax is the system used here, they don't have machines that take VHS. I believe there is a video available about the work and death of Chico Mendez in Brazil?

2. If any of you work in, with or for anti-drug campaigns, or know of people who do, there is a simple, urgent message that needs getting across to drug-users: **YOU ARE NOT ONLY KILLING YOURSELVES, YOU ARE SLOWLY KILLING THE WORLD. THE LAST FORESTS ARE BEING DESTROYED TO SUPPORT YOUR HABIT.** I feel very strongly about this: it is in vogue today to 'worship the victim'. But I believe the intrinsic aggressiveness of self-destruction should be pointed out clearly. The position of the United States is particularly violent: first, they refuse to look at the Devil within, the empty, meaningless life-style they have created which leads people to the dead-end of drug-taking. Then they blame Third world peasants, impoverished through the stranglehold of the US and its allies, for growing the cocaine and heroin. And then they give 'aid' to countries like Colombia to attack the peasants and their crops, as if that is going to make life in American cities any more meaningful. I am not aware of the drug-and-deforestation issues being linked in 'green' literature. If I am wrong, please send me any literature available, particularly if drug addicts themselves are being shown the global meaning of what they are doing. **COLOMBIA IS NOT KILLING THE JUNKIES: THE JUNKIES ARE KILLING COLOMBIA!** Meanwhile any available visual aids to 'guilt-trip' the campesinos here about what they are growing, I will gladly use!

3. On the North-West coast of Ireland - County Donegal - I own a huge house, 18 rooms, an ex-hotel; old-fashioned, not modernised - open fire-places; it stands on about half an acre of land. It is in the little fishing port of Burtonport, population a couple of hundred; and is five minutes walk from untouched rocky, sandy beaches. The house is up for sale for over ninety thousand pounds I believe (my daughter Becky is managing the sale). If any 'green-minded' group or individuals would be interested in purchasing this building for use in some ecological fashion, or for running as a business which would provide funds for environmental organisations or activities, we would consider a much lower price, and with this guarantee: whatever is paid for that house will go directly to purchase and save as much endangered forest in this area as possible. Alternatively, if any group or individuals would like to run that house to provide an income to buy forest for the Caquetá Rainforest Campaign, as well as maintaining themselves and the house in good condition, we would be very interested in hearing any propositions. Ditto if anyone is interested in renting the house, and all rent-money would be used exclusively for saving trees. The house can be visited at any time: contact Becky Garcia, An Droichead Beo (it means The Living Bridge in Gaelic), Burtonport, Co. Donegal, Eire.

4. Another underused resource we have in Ireland is a 1911 ex-fishing boat, a beautiful old vessel, moored in Co. Cork. We are looking for help to fit her out, sail her, and use her as a floating green-campaigning home. Anyone interested in this project, please contact Becky at above address.

Anyone who is touched by these issues, please write - your letters are the lifeblood of this campaign - or better still come and visit and see for yourselves and TALK, it would be just so delicious to have someone to talk to!

Meanwhile, I will close: I am going to write to the Colombian Government's anti-illegal crop campaign (PLANTE) to demand they help sort out the horrors going down in this region. They won't of course - they quietly leave all that to the FARC guerrilla force! - but never let it be said I leave any stone unturned...

Good wishes to all green workers; please send your thoughts, suggestions, and practical help.

Jenny James

Contents of GL No. 8:

Mr. and Mrs. Bullough send money to save Ricardo's forest

The magic hamlet of Chorreras: introducing Cliomedes, Camilo & Roberto.

Green activities in the unlikely cowboy town of Guayabal

Hugo, a Green government-man arrives

JJ introduces him to the local guerrilla commander....

Caquetá, Colombia

(Postal Address: AA895, Neiva, Huila, Colombia)

Greetings to all Green Workers in Europe!

If I tell you lots and lots of good news, will you all promise not to go away and say, 'Ah well, she's alright now,'?!

My last letter was written in agony as a next-door neighbour aggressively chain-sawed down part of his forest near us. His aggression worked, and so did my plea for help. Two wonderful unknown friends in England, **Mr. & Mrs. Bullough**, immediately sent £4,000 for the farm, and after much hassle with Ricardo, our neighbour, we have finally come to an agreement whereby he keeps the part of his land already opened and sells us every single inch where there are trees - this includes a huge mountainside above us where you can actually see the damp mist and clouds forming just before it rains on us. To Mary and Colin Bullough, 'thankyou' is a weak word for what we feel. You have just shown a hardened atheist that well-directed and deeply-felt 'prayer' works! You have taught us once again that positively-handled, loudly expressed despair works! And you have proved that there are certain issues - specifically an acheing empathy with the natural world - that can unite people, anywhere. So not only 'thankyou' on behalf of the trees and all the creatures therein, but thankyou for renewing hope and vigour in this campaign.

Some of our first and strongest supporters in England, **Steve Thompson** and **Cynthia Dickinson**, both of Yorkshire, have also continued to respond magnificently at every turn, establishing a fund for small donations, publicizing these Green Letters in a dozen newssheets and sending astonishing quantities of seeds - huge thanks here also to Unwin's and Fothergill's who have been amazingly generous. Steve sent out £660, which was what had accumulated in the fund so far. This translates as one million pesos. Although not enough to buy any more forest, we have put the money to very exciting use. This is the story:

Two hours down the mountain and then two hours by bumpy bus, there is a tiny little settlement called Chorreras ('river rapids'). I do not understand the alchemy that is at work in this region, but I know what it feels like and am constantly humbled by it. Chorreras consists of about 15 shacks along the roadside. It has grown up exclusively for the cutting down of forest. Now the lorries no longer trundle along that road with their cargo of wood since marketing in timber was recently banned by a combination of unlikely forces: 'Corpoamazonia', a government organization for the preservation of the Colombian Amazon region; a green councillor called Eduardo Rincon and his friends, including some 'gringos' on a mountainside, and the FARC guerrilla force. But most importantly, with the agreement and co-operation of the people of Chorreras itself, who have understood they are destroying themselves by destroying their environment.

But what do they do now for a living? No more wood-cutting. So they have to plant amapola - opium poppy - to survive. At least, that's how their thinking has gone up to now. But a very quiet 31 year old man in Chorreras made contact with me one day via my children to ask for some comfrey roots to plant. My ears pricked up. Someone in the depths of this decadent region knows about comfrey? He has to be a special person. I met him. He is. His name is Cliomedes and he is the person I have needed to meet ever since the founding of this campaign. Rooted totally in his community, with a supportive wife and four very small children, completely without resources, working every day to subsist, sharing completely all the difficulties of his neighbours, he is a self-educated man who laps up with tears of gratitude in his eyes every little gift of written material I am able to take him: a book on acupuncture, one on hypnosis, an excellent ecological manual produced by the Colombian government for school-teachers, posters from 'Amnesty International'; booklets produced in the '60s by the Agrarian Bank (Caja Agraria) on self-sufficient farming (now they pretend you need poisons and chemicals to grow anything); second-hand clothes for distributing amongst the neighbours - and weekly English classes for the community.

Our friendship has grown subtly, strongly, deeply. Knowing how much I wanted to find a local leader who wasn't interested in being a 'leader', but who cared deeply and sensitively about the way of life of the people, I didn't want to hope too much. So I held my breath and kept listening to him. And then, recently, I got my Irish friends Alan McGrath and Anne Barr to visit Chorreras and check out my perceptions. And then I knew I hadn't dreamed Cliomedes up. Whatismore, he is not alone - part of the magic of the region is that there are so many individuals miraculously collected in the one place, all joined by the same spirit of intense desire to bring about a quiet green revolution in this area. Also in Chorreras are Camilo, the school-teacher, hungry for any environmental education we can help him provide for his children; and Roberto, president of the community action group, a chainsaw man whose life's work has been cutting down trees. The day after tomorrow, he and Cliomedes will be making the gruelling trek to this farm to come and stay for two days to learn as much as they can about organic gardening, to take the knowledge back to their community and teach.

Listening to Cliomedes talk last week about all the things he'd love to be able to do in Chorreras, I was overwhelmed with the desire to help. But what with? Then I remembered the money Steve had sent, specifically to 'save trees' and I thought, if helping these people isn't saving trees, then I don't know what is, and I decided with the other people on our farm that we would offer the Chorreras community one million pesos to get on the way any projects tending to swerve peoples life-style away from destructive agricultural practices and attitudes and towards a more enthusiastic and joyful appreciation of their lovely environment. I wrote to them as a group, saying that many unknown people in England, themselves of scant resources, had donated small sums of money to make up that million and all with the desire to help Colombian farmers look after their forests, I said I wanted to be able to trust completely that the money would be used well but that I definitely didn't want to intrude or act as overseer in any way. In spite of this, Camilo the schoolteacher when I next met him practically begged me to oversee the projects; in the end, I said I would become part of the group as a friend, not a judge.

Anne was in Chorreras two days ago; the last thing she saw was the schoolkids being organized to clear up the banks of the exquisite river which had been used for decades as rubbish tips. I had expressed horror several visits ago at the fact that the toilets of the hamlet tip into the stream - used further down no

doubt for cooking water for other communities - and that such a beautiful place should be turned into a garbage dump. This gesture on their part gives me a liquid feeling in my heart chakra and seals my trust after a long period of bumps and disillusion!

There is more. Guayabal is the largest local settlement where campesinos from the whole area come at weekends to do their shopping and get drunk. It is a ghastly place, muddy, ugly, dead-end, loud generator-run disco music, a horrible church and ugly FARC slogans sprayed over the whole village. But something is happening there too. After decades of government neglect, with the mediation of the little green movement and the permission of the guerrilla force, representatives of benevolent official organizations such as Corpoamazonia and the National Parks section of the Ministry for the Environment are coming into the region. At a meeting in Guayabal recently, I met many of these officials and was mainly very impressed: simple, sincere, concerned individuals with an obvious understanding of campesino - and guerrilla - psychology. To my disbelief, one man, called Hugo, introduced himself to me and said he was coming to live permanently in the Guayabal police station as a kind of environmental rep. I have to explain what 'police station' means. It is a hideous concrete building with 4 toilets, 4 bedrooms, a huge hallway, a kitchen and an office inhabited by the otherwise homeless school-teachers of Guayabal, used by the local 'police inspector', who is a founder member of the green movement, and belonging to the now-defunct government organization called Inderena (Institute for the Defence of Natural Resources) which seems to have spent all its time giving permits for destroying trees. Corpoamazonia have now taken ownership of the building - I met a man sent by them to paint a big sign announcing that the people of Guayabal are now going to help protect their forests: this sign is huge and dominates the entrance-road to the little town. He immediately took hold of our 'CRAC' logo -Caqueta Rainforest Campaign - and incorporated part of it into his design!

I did not believe Hugo would really come to live and work here, but I turned up anyway, on the Thursday he was due to move into the police station. I jumped, sweaty and muddy, onto the open-sided bus in Rovira, after the long trek down our mountain, and someone tapped me on the shoulder. He was real! The grin wouldn't leave my face all the way to Guayabal. A real live captive government environmental worker, alone and friendless and totally unknown in all this region: someone I could walk with, talk with, plan with, build with. He was as relieved and delighted to see me as I was elated to see him. I said 'I need urgently to talk to you in private'. When we arrived at the concrete nightmare that was to be his home, I came straight to the point: Look, I know you work for the government, but the only way you can even hope for success here is if you have the OK of the guerrilla. 'Great,' he says, 'can you arrange me a meeting?'

Next morning, as Hugo and I walked the 4 hours back to Rovira - he was coming to spend a few days on our farm, I spotted Enrique, the local guerrilla commander and whispered to him who my new friend was, and he said, 'We'll meet in Rovira.' Hugo and I continued our hot journey, he delighted, if a little nervous at the speed things were moving. Arriving in Rovira, a jeep pulled up and Enrique got out. 'Huh!' says I to him, 'social injustice indeed!' and we all laughed - I was referring to the fact that we'd had to walk and he'd got a posh lift.

Would you blame me for a small smirk of delight at thusly organizing an - illegal - meeting between the Colombian government's representative and a leader of its armed opposition? And all in the green cause?!

Hugo had confided in me that he wouldn't be getting paid for another month and hadn't even money for food. So for his first days in the region, I lent him my welly boots, fed him, paid his bus-fares, bought him a blanket, made sure he had a room and bed - the teachers most rudely weren't even going to move over for him - and introduced him to everyone I knew. Then I went on a gruelling two day walk with him and the local police inspector to get to know more of the region. And then I went home.

This story will be continued, but for now, goodbye and thanks to the many people in Europe who provide the backbone of this campaign.

With love,

Jenny James

Contents of Green Letter No. 9:

Poem on Luis Arenas' death used as detective device to flush out Luis's murderer.

Goodbye to Enrique, the guerrilla commander.

Anne saves forest by doing astrological charts.

Saving a wild animal from captivity.

A brush with the local priest.... And much more.

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GREEN LETTER No. 9, 17th May, 1996

Caqueta, Colombia

Dear Green Friends in Europe,

I write today to ground myself after being blown away by the enormity of the rainforest problem as depicted in Alex Shoumatoff's book on the murder of Chico Mendes in Brazil, called "The World is Burning."

I have to remind myself that I'm actually living in the forest and doing the small bit that I can to save it. As Mr. John Seymour, an organic gardening guru and friend, writes inside the cover of one of his wonderful illustrated gardening books which he has kindly donated us, **"I am only one. I can only do what one can do. But what one can do, I will do."**

That helps me to hold on and not despair at the enormity of it all. So does looking outside my cabin door. It is twenty to six in the evening. In half an hour, night will fall as it does at the same time all the year round. There is a beautiful fluffy white forest mist, and the trees so peaceful and so near, I could almost believe the whole world were like this..as long as I don't look across the valley at the half-bared mountain-range beyond. Staying centred, and therefore constructive, seems to be a huge part of this work.

Reading about Chico Mendez' murder and the tremendous world-wide reactions to it, made me mourn afresh for my friend Luis, murdered last August for his environmental work - and how many thousands of others, unknown and unsung? Again, I have to remind myself to 'stay small', it is the only way to be effective - if I cripple myself mourning the death of millions, I can do nothing about the death of one.

With regard to Luis, what I did was to write two poems in Spanish, one to Luis himself, promising that his work would not die; the other to the "Assassins of Luis Arenas". These two poems I sent, without further comment, to the Mayor of Milan, the small riverside settlement where Luis was riddled with bullets. The Mayor there is regarded by the local population as the 'intellectual author' behind the murder. On the envelope, I put as the sender the "International Network of Solidarity with Luis Arenas". A month or so later, I received news via the countryside grapevine that the Mayor of Milan was complaining he had received 'death threats' from Neiva - the town in my address. Strange reaction. here is the translation of my "death threats":

Dwarves cannot envisage even the toes of a giant.

Shortsighted men cannot see anything unless it is under their nose.

Cowards cannot conceive of the possibility of bravery.

Selfish men cannot imagine what it means to care for others.

Senseless men cannot understand a universal concept of Life.

Soulless men have no idea of the pleasure of feeling for all that lives.

Blind men don't realize that there are eyes, many eyes, watching them.

Men who rely on the cold force of metal, don't understand the superior power of love.

Men ruled by envy can't imagine the existence of a generous man.

Men who cannot handle their rage except through a paid assassin don't notice

***that there is a whole world of people who communicate with one another, people who are not afraid, people who won't shut up, people who are watching, people who know,
people in solidarity with Luis Erasmo Arenas.
Little assassins of Luis: he is at peace now; his seed has been sown; its first leaves are budding.
And you: are you resting in peace?***

Now, why wasn't the Mayor of Milan, who always presented himself as a Friend of Luis, over the moon that there was a mysterious group of foreigners caring for justice for his friend and why didn't he write to us immediately to ask more? But no, he told people he was receiving 'death threats', and accepted that the poem, entitled: 'To the Assassins of Luis Arenas', was addressed to him. Interesting.

Last week, two young guerrilla soldiers came sweating up our mountain path to ask me very politely, would I have time to go down to see their commander, as he had to leave the region for security reasons and he wanted to hand me over, that is, introduce me to, the incoming commander.

I was very sad. Enrique had become a beloved friend. I knew he had to go, as he'd narrowly escaped losing his life not long ago when the army entered disguised as road-workers and shot at him from their lorry. It was Enrique who had provided me with the unforgettable image of a guerrilla commander sitting on my bed amidst a mountain of seed packets sent from Europe, gazing at them in huge reverence and holding up one packet saying: "This will undermine the government more than any bullet."

At the end of our goodbye meeting, I asked him if he had any news regarding the investigation of Luis's death. "No, except that it definitely wasn't the guerrillas." "Yes, I know that," I said, "But what can be done to get justice for Luis?" "But Jenny, he answered, "para que mas muertes? - why more deaths?" I walked away from our last meeting puzzled and annoyed. Fed up because a guerrilla leader had taken a more pacifist position - a position that would in fact leave yet another murderer walking around free and pleased with himself - than I, who in the sixties saw the inside of several prisons for my part in pacifist civil disobedience. Faced with the murder of a dear friend, I could not stomach such a laissez-faire attitude.

Trying to forget the ghastly statistics on forest destruction in Brazil, measured in hundreds of thousands of hectares in the Chico Mendez book, I offer the humble good news that we are on our way to purchasing another 100 hectares of beautiful forest above our farm. Our method of raising the money for this (about £5,000) must be unique: during the scare over our neighbour Ricardo knocking down forest below us, and before we received the wonderful monetary gift from Mr. and Mrs. Bullough (see last Green Letter), we went into emergency action. Anne, who is Irish, has been in our community since 1983 and has become a wizard astrologess. And because she's foreign and looks like a gypsy, doesn't charge much and has a solid backing in sensible psychology, when she goes to the towns, she is able to earn very rapidly. She tells her clients what the money is needed for - to save the forest - and so her concerned customers find

her more clients. The big disadvantage is that she has to be away from the farm and go back to the very life-style we came here to get away from. The last news I had from her, she wrote from Quito in Ecuador saying she was doing the chair of the Colombian ambassador.

Ricardo, since we managed to buy his forest, has remained a good and close friend. He has a little house and bar in Rovira, the first tiny hamlet on the road two hours' steep descent below us. Even when not at home, we are allowed in to use his shower. One day I walked into it to freshen up from the hot journey and let out a scream. There was something chained in there: an animal I had never seen before, a tree-climbing animal judging by its long tail and splayed toes. It was curled up in the dark, wet, concrete shower place, chained tightly around the neck, in utter misery, looking at me with large round desperate eyes, given up. Tears flooded from me. I asked the young couple looking after Ricardo's shop: "What on earth is this and what is it doing here?" "It's a *perro de monte*," they said, which translates as 'forest dog'. But it was nothing like a dog, except it had a lead on. And they grinned in that uncaring and bemused fashion to which I have become accustomed when they see me as an odd foreign lady with odd feelings about odd things.

"Tell Ricardo I will buy this animal from him to let it go free," I said, and wrote him a note to make sure the message got through. I knew this was a dicey move, as, if the news got around, all the local peasants would be capturing animals just so the odd *gringa* lady would buy them to let them go. But this particular creature existed, saving it was in my power, and I couldn't bear to turn my back. I had to take the risk.

We paid Ricardo the £50 he asked for it, and our boys brought it home. When we tried to cut the harness off it, it fought wildly and bit Martyn right through a leather glove. We left it to calm down and later the boys, dressed for battle, tried again. Our 'perro de monte' let them cut him free this time, and he trotted off slowly, dazed by the light and freedom, to climb a tree. I still don't know what it was.

Ricardo came to visit a few days later. "Jenny, I'm going to start a vegetable garden", he said. "Have you any seeds?" To influence large, lazy Ricardo who is not hard up, into such an activity was a feat indeed. All the local schools are also starting gardens - the teachers here, astonishingly underpaid, are more like social missionaries: they are practically the only source of ideological training that children in these country areas get, and a heartening percentage of them are environmentally concerned. One young teacher, called Angel (a normal name round here) has just spent the weekend with us. On his miniscule tape recorder, he taped Fin (a normal name in Ireland!) singing a song of the forest which he wrote in English and which I translated. Angel said, "This is to raise the children's awareness." He wants to return bringing ten selected pupils to stay on the farm, though he's worried some of them won't take well to the extreme 'greenness' of our vegetarian food!

The time I went to the meeting with Enrique, I had to gulp back another huge chunk of personal prejudice. I'm an atheist and I don't like priests. So when, months ago, I was introduced to the rather odd Argentinian local priest (long hair in a pony tail and garish Bermuda shorts?!), I said, "You have just met an enemy of the church." And since then, we have been carefully steering around one another, trying not to meet - difficult in a very small community. The day my 10 year old daughter Katie and I went to say goodbye to Enrique, we were splashing along in the mud and rain on the three hour walk to Guayabal when the

priest's car came squelching along. Oh dear, I said to Katie, as I could feel the offer coming . Yes, he stopped and we piled in. The car was full of friends from the Green movement, Hugo of the Parks Commission and Edwin of the local Government Environmental Organization 'Corpoamazonia'. Hugo was playful as usual: he knew of the 'atmosphere' between me and the priest. "Oh Jenny," he said, "Padre Domingo wants to start a vegetable garden round the church, have you any seed?" "Yes, of course," I said, "I'll send you a selection of everything that will grow here." The magic of the colour Green - no prejudices are sacred!

I must end this Letter or we'll have no food planted for next month. But one last anecdote: sitting in the Corpoamazonia office in Guayabal, co-opted on to the Park Committee with all those people who were in the car, the priest included, late that evening, a peasant woman came in, mumbling to Edwin about a 'safe-conduct' - a document needed before any more wood can be taken out of the region.

Politely, carefully, and explaining at great length, Edwin, the dispenser of such documents, refused. The situation was awkward. There we all were, planning how best to protect the enormous 'Parque de los Picacachos', the huge National Park we live on the edges of - and here was a worried local woman whose next bit of cash depended on getting her blocks of wood out. This in a nutshell was the whole Third World environmental problem. I watched fascinated, hardly daring to breathe, to see how these people would resolve it.

Edwin explained to her that the situation was very tricky, and that the last person in is job had ended up in jail through handing out illegal permits. Then Hugo delicately and with great feeling gave a down-to-earth philosophical lecture. He said, Isn't it strange how no good ever comes of bad? How nobody ever got rich through destroying trees, because once they were sold - what next? Nothing had been produced, no crop had been sown, no-one had had to grow the tree which was hundreds of years old; that the people were creating a dependency on cutting more and more forest, and when it had gone, what then? That ultimately, we can only live well if we produce our own food and don't expect it to 'fall off the trees'.

It was a hard lesson, but the woman went away knowing that a line had been drawn. I felt split to pieces, between my love of the forest, and my embarrassment at being aligned with Office Types saying No to a peasant woman. But the issue is quite definitely to change people's lifestyles, back to where we all started from: self-sufficiency.

I end by once again inviting anyone out here who would like to come, and by saying that seeds and more seeds are always most welcome. Thank you Jim and Meredith of Ecuador for your hot-country fruit seeds, which have been sent to the flatter hotter areas below our mountain range. And a continuing thankyou for all the heartfelt, encouraging and moving letters we receive - I often feel overwhelmed with the good feelings being sent my way and regenerated in my worst down moments when all seems hopeless. And lastly, to anyone in or near Ireland - my daughter Becky is holding a Caqueta Rainforest festival in Burtonport, Co. Donegal, from August 10th to 17th, with vegetarian food and plenty of accommodation available; there will be Colombians there, plus slideshows and videos, music and dancing. Just turn up.

With love to you all,

Jenny James

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Contents:

Seeds from China

Talking of gardens, plants, seeds...

Anne home from Ecuador where she worked to buy more forest, describes our farm and offers astrological services

Letter from teacher Camilo describing how they set up their own school...

Green Letter No. 10, 29th June 1996

*Caquetá Rainforest Campaign (C.R.A.C.)
AA 895, Neiva, Huila,
Colombia, South America*

I can no longer address these Green Letters to our 'Friends in Europe' as the response we are receiving from all over the world increases weekly. And so:

Warm and grateful greetings to Green Workers all over the world!

What an incredible surprise it was for us here last week to receive an extraordinary gift from **China**! Some unknown well-wisher must have sent our Green Letters to the 'Known-You' Seed Co. in Taiwan, and this is the charming message I received:

“Thank you very much for your...meaningful 'Green Letters' ...in which you introduced C.R.A.C. and many of its decent movements and touching stories as well to us.” Accompanying this message is the astonishing gift of **seven kilos** of seeds!

Well, this has changed the face of our campaign, for we will now have to extend considerably the area we are working in - a challenge we accept completely. More than half of the Chinese seeds are suitable only

for hot country, and so we are organising ourselves to go on a lengthy seed-distribution and Green missionary journey, which will have to include some of the more dangerous cocaine-producing country in Lower Caquetá. **Mr. Hsien-Yu-Wu**, we thank you for your exceptionally generous boost to our forest-saving campaign. The seeds sent from China are: tomato, hot pepper, broccoli, Chinese cabbage and watermelon, and no other varieties, so **please** anyone who was going to send a single humble packet of pansies or watercress - don't be put off! We will use and distribute with care every single gift, and the smallest is as valued as the largest.

Mrs. **Kathleen Jannaway** of the Vegan movement in England has been sending me some wonderful and uplifting literature, including her own personal signed copy of 'Forest Gardening' by Robert Hart: what a lovely, simple, caring, practical book, which endorses so gratifyingly much of what we are doing and teaches us so much more. As a result of reading Mr. Hart's book and other literature, we would love to receive any of the following seeds; soapwort; horsetail; nettle; dandelion; Jerusalem artichokes; quinoa; yarrow; hyssop; lavender. We are also ever on the lookout for information on natural pest control, have received lots, but want to keep on testing everything so we can advise local people with confidence.

And now, I want to ask you all to do something very simple and important: every time you buy an apple, a pear, a plum, a grapefruit, an orange, any fruit whatsoever from any climate whatsoever, would you take out the pips, dry them, and send them to us?! Now that we have decided to work in a wider area - all the way from our cool, wet mountain, to the suffocating heat below - there is practically nothing we couldn't use, unless it requires desert, or very very dry conditions, of which there are none! (yet)

Thankyou Bill, a friend of Cynthia Dickinson, for your giant sunflower seeds - they have all come up in spite of the terrifying rainy season we are in (that goes on for months and months and months). My instinctual desire to have a riot of flowers and flowering shrubs has now been confirmed by my gardening reading to be of health value to food plants, so we will be delighted to receive any flower-seeds - here flowers bloom 12 months of the year. Our method in general is to try everything out in our own gardens, so that we know what we are talking about when we make recommendations to local people.

We receive that heartening newspaper 'Planetary Connections' full of Positive News from around the world, and as a result of seeing the number of essential oils, health foods and medicines on sale, for example grapefruit seed extract, we want to ask a special favour: the constant problem here is how to answer the question from locals, "Yes, we agree with you completely that we shouldn't cut down any more forest; but what shall we live from?" Vegetables will eventually feed people, but how to live while the gardens are being established? And so we thought: how about a 'cottage industry' involving all the marvellous plants that can be grown here - for example the huge aloe vera cactuses. When we need skin cream or treatment for a burn, we cut off a 'finger' of the aloe vera and use it direct; if we want a soul-lift, we go out and sniff the exquisite flower of the passion-fruit; and every day, we drink pints of a range of aromatic tea-herbs. But, how could we **preserve** the wonderful smells and creams for sale? Is there anyone working in these small industries who would be willing to teach us, by post or directly, how to prepare these plants to a saleable standard, so that we could teach local people? It just seems so absurd that they are living amidst such wealth and don't know it - don't even grow or use these plants for themselves.

And now, a neat little idea from my friend, Anne, who is just back from Ecuador: If anyone wants to come out to see us, but simply can't afford the fare, she says: "A way to cover your airfare is to fly to Ecuador - the same price as flying to Bogota, Colombia - and take the bus up from Quito to Neiva: It will cost you 30 pound more on bus fares **but** by buying Indian-made items in Otavalo market (two hours from Quito) on your way home, you can recuperate your travel costs when back home: exquisitely beautiful shirts, jackets, waistcoats, hand-woven bracelets, hats, mats and hammocks are all incredibly cheap, especially if you buy by the dozen, and can be sold for 4-5 times the price in Europe and **still seem very cheap** to a European. Recently a well-wisher bought a big sack full of these lovely goods for about 60 pounds and presented them to Becky in Ireland to sell to benefit C.R.A.C. Example: a beautiful woven woollen jacket with hood, costing 3 pound in Otavalo can fetch at least 20 pound in England and seem cheap. The price of the extra bus-fare is almost evened up by the fact that the airport tax in Bogota is 40 dollars and in Quito it's 20."

And now, some words from Anne about her forest-saving mission to Ecuador: "I've just returned home from a very long 3 months in Ecuador earning the 4.300 dollars needed to complete purchase of our next patch of forest - Orlando's farm, about 150 hectares. It was an interesting experience - I met lots of good people involved in eco-projects in Ecuador - but one I hope never to repeat. I did about 180 astrology charts in two and a half months and finally collapsed with anaemia. I got treated more than well by everyone I met - thank you Joui, Jean, Douglas, Martha and Murray for your amazing help, support and encouragement. But boy am I glad to be home: breathing car fumes in order to earn money to buy trees somehow doesn't compute!

"Reaching the mountains of El Pato, I felt myself begin to breathe properly for the first time in three months, my eyes and brain relaxed, fed by the greenness of the forests. Certainly I saw many more patches burnt and cleared since I left, but there are still enough tree-covered hills to make my journey and work seem worthwhile. I got off the bumpy bus in Rovira to be met by a big beautiful green notice-board on stilts dominating the otherwise ugly little hamlet saying in Spanish, "Visit Atlantis Ecological Community. Two and a half hours' walk", decorated with flowers, leaves, butterflies and insects painted by our little artist, 12-year-old Alice, Jenny's daughter. I staggered up the muddy path, arriving in the dark. Next morning, my 3-month absence came home to me as I saw how tall the newly planted trees and bushes had grown and revelled in the mass of flowers. The earth in the vegetable gardens is richer and blacker than ever, there seem to be enough vegetables to feed an army and the chicken-and-guinea-pig 'compost-factory' has become a mini-hobbitland of runways and hutches and piles of rich compost in varying stages of decay. No wonder Jenny is stiff with neck and arm pains from so many years' gardening.

But I don't want our future forest-buying to depend any more on me going constantly to the cities. So I want to suggest the following: I want to do my astrology-work at home by post. So I'm offering you all my services, with the guarantee that all proceeds will be entirely and absolutely for C.R.A.C. I will provide a drawn-up horoscope with a detailed typed interpretation of character, present and future trends in your life and, if you include the date of birth of people important to you, I can interpret the relationship and the lessons, joys and problems that it represents. Information needed: date, place and TIME of birth if possible, plus sex of person; but most South Americans have no record of their time of birth so I've become used to working without it. I am going to ask a basic 50 English pounds for the chart, interpretation and family relationship interpretation, but I will accept less from anyone really short of

money; and I would ask anyone who can afford more to send it, knowing that the money will be used only for this green campaign. Please do not try to send money to Colombia, but your details and fee to: Becky Garcia, CRAC Campaign, An Droichead Beo, Burtonport, Co. Donegal, Eire. We answer all post immediately, but of course sending and collecting letters in the wilds involves some delay. I hope you will help me to stay at home and work on the garden by using my services! Love, Anne.”

Jenny writing now with the 'commercial' for Anne which she's too embarrassed to add: she's done about 800 charts in the last 2 years, does all our transits (that's what's affecting us now in the sky) almost daily when at home and is brilliant, if sometimes a little too optimistic - I'm teaching her to be more of a pessimist! In Ecuador she did the chart for a presidential candidate Freddy Ehlers without knowing who he was and correctly predicted the outcome. The story went round like wild-fire through the salons of Quito high society and diplomats, heads of banks, film stars and playboys came to her for their charts to be done.

Our contact and work with the local community of Chorreras and its small green group continues, deepens and widens. Here is the translation of a little note Cliomedes sent me some while back:

“Señora Jenny: I want to thank you and all at Atlantis* for caring about our situation, something which even the government doesn't do; quite the opposite, it seems to want to make us even poorer, and it is obvious that just like us, there are thousands of peasant families living in the most absolute poverty.”
*(*C.R.A.C., being the English title of the campaign, is too complicated for local people, so they know us as 'Atlantis', the name of our farm and commune).*

On my last visit to Chorreras, I handed over a very large packet of seeds for distribution and was touched to see how religiously they handed out the seeds to each family, writing everything down and giving little lectures about their good and careful use, which made me squirm a bit, but it is their way of doing it. We have now sent them some chicken-wire so they can fence off a rather pathetic piece of land next to the school where, starting with hard, compacted clay, they are going to build up a layer of compost and earth to begin a school vegetable garden. I asked Camilo, the school-teacher, to write down the history of his school; I think his simple account brings home conditions here better than anything I could write. Camilo is, with Cliomedes and Don Roberto, the President of the local action group, one of the main 'green' forces for change in the area.

“My name is Camilo Ruiz Santacruz and I work in the school of Chorreras in a hamlet of the jurisdiction of San Vincente del Caguan, Caquetá. Chorreras consists of 30 families, all of which have come from other areas in the hope of finding in this region a better standard of living for their children. It is a very united community; when something bad happens, we all get together to help as much as we can.

Our climate is neither very hot nor very cold, between 17 and 20°C, and we are at 1.000 metres above sea level. My salary as a teacher is 160 US\$ a month; on this I am supposed to exist with my family (wife and two children). *(Note from Jenny: he works labouring on the road in the afternoons to make ends meet.)* As we are a long way from the nearest town (Neiva), we had to buy even our own chalk and for a blackboard we had to cut some planks of wood and paint them. The children dress very simply, but they all have rubber boots as they have to travel a long way from their homes to the school and the pathways

are very muddy. (*Note from JJ: they are gruelling mudslides caused by donkey-traffic and often extremely steep.*) The child who lives farthest away walks one hour to get to school.

We began by giving classes in individual houses (*Note: the 'houses' are ramshackle shacks of wooden planks and corrugated iron roofs.*); 2 months in each house and so on all the year round. But last year, the people, the children and the teacher collected rocks and sand so that we could make a proper school. We asked for the help of the district council and they granted us the equivalent of 1.400 US Dollar; with this, we bought cement, building blocks and sheets of corrugated iron. A man from here donated a little piece of land which we adapted to build the school; and in two months, all working together, we built our little school. (*Note: It has one classroom plus one tiny room and miniscule kitchen for the teacher and his wife to live in. It is right on the road - a muddy unsurfaced track – and everything has to stop every time a lorry or bus passes because of the noise; also for the dynamite blasts right outside where they are - dangerously - extracting rock from the mountainside to repair the 'road'!*)

We have several ecological projects in mind, and a great friend Jenny James from a community called Atlantis gives us impetus to keep going with things like vegetable gardens, running the green group of people who want to look after the environment, encouraging art in the children, etc. We would like to know your opinions and to exchange correspondence; please tell us what you would like to know about our people... I will end with the motto of the school: 'We like working because work keeps the brain alert, conquers laziness and animates the heart.'

Camilo's little school has some very strange things on the wall: a poster in Irish about the sessile oaktree; gorgeous posters of endangered species in German; and many environmental posters in English, along with Nature pictures produced by Camilo and his schoolchildren. Please keep sending these things! He also has the beginnings of a little community environmental library, which also boasts odd items such as a pile of National Geographic magazines and an exquisite gardening book from John Seymour - in Portuguese; also excellent ecological material produced by the Colombian government specifically for consciousness raising in the schools which would **never** ever have reached this area: Anne came across these pamphlets in Bogota and brought them here. One of the things we could most use in all the schools round here is MAPS of the whole Amazon area and its endangered species: most people here haven't the foggiest idea of where they are placed in the world and the ecological significance to us all of the land they are living in.

I would like to close today with some little poems my daughter Louise shocks me with from time to time. This one was produced in all of 10 minutes as she was weeding the carrots. I have corrected only her spelling, as although just turned 15, her natural language for writing is Spanish.

GREEN

Green is the colour of vegetation
Green is the colour of hope;
And I hope the next generation
Will be able to see its growth.

Grey is the colour of concrete
Grey is the colour of death;

And death is what will become of us
When there's no Greenness left.

When 14, she wrote:

FLY LIKE AN EAGLE

Through the forest
Across the countryside
I watch an eagle gently glide;
She's going home, just like me,
She's got a nest high in a tree;
She has two babies, maybe three.
One day they'll fly, just like me.

Good bye for now,
Jenny James

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2nd Anniversary, of the Caquetá Farm

The crowded, opensided rickety bus stopped. There was a huge cleft in the unsurfaced road. The passengers groaned good-naturedly and got out, lugging their huge loads of shopping bought in Neiva. No-one thought of asking for their fare back, though we were only half the way to Rovira, Caquetá.

It was **13th July 1994**. With me were my daughter Alice, whose 11th birthday present the day before had been to come on this trip with us; also Gareth, a young English friend whose mother had read about us in a New Age magazine called 'Kindred Spirit', and Ned who had bought the farm in Caquetá whence we were headed.

We walked all the rest of that day. I was delighted. It was cool, green mountain country, and I knew I would not return to Tolima where I had lived for six years, and that a whole new era of our lives was about to begin.

But the first thing we had to do was cross the avalanches. There were about 300 of them. Massive, sodden, orange land-slips obviously caused by cutting the road in the first place, and then carefully deforesting all the slopes above. Then the cracking of the earth during the dry season; and then the rains, which go on for months and months.

Our two men were very heavily laden; Alice and I were not, but she had her height to cope with - not very tall when you're stepping gingerly into very deep wet mud; and I had my fear: it seems the only way to cross these roadside avalanches is right on the edge where the land disappears into the valley below. If you try the 'safer' looking bit near the cliff, you disappear in deep sludge.

Spirits were high. We had half the population of this part of Caquetá travelling with us, though they quickly left us behind, as we weren't in a hurry and weren't quite as confident of our immortality as they seemed to be. Peasant shacks along the roadway sold stodgy, welcome meals and we tripped along gaily towards the night. There was no way we would reach the farm that day, but we were given an empty farm-house to stay in, with a huge earth-floored kitchen where Ned made a meal by candlelight and I played my violin, with Gareth on flute, into the night air. We then made a communal bed in a ghastly dark little room, piling anything we could find on to the bare earth and keeping all our clothes on.

Next day, as we approached Rovira, we heard that three children had died that night when one of the larger avalanches swept their house away into the valley. They were in bed asleep at the time.

Laden as we were, and having already walked for two days, it was about a four-hour climb up the mountain to the farm after leaving the road. Halfway up, we were invited into a magnificent dinner; hospitality everywhere in this region was warm.

There weren't any trees left standing on this part of the mountain until we came very near to our farm indeed; then at last, the green, muddy, shady paths and mountain streams of the world as it had once been everywhere: we had come home.

By the time I reached the farm, I was absolutely sure that the whole region was unstable: I stared aghast at the way the little farm-shack was perched on a small hard shoulder between two water-courses. I looked alarmed up at the forest above us on a steep, steep slope just 500 yards from the house and wondered what would happen if **that** slipped. I started making an urgent 'Jobs List' in my mind as I saw that piped water was being allowed to run unchanneled down **both** sides of the house, eroding the narrow strip on which we were perched. I eyed suspiciously every part of the steep fields surrounding us where recently-fallen red clay glared menacingly. And I listened to the constant rain.

In the days to come, I was further horrified to find a huge area right next to us where you couldn't walk as the land was so soft and cleaved from an enormous subsidence 10 years ago that no horse or cow would tread anywhere near it. I greeted with total cynicism Ned's assertion that the sun **did** actually shine for part of the year in this region. But my main feeling was excitement: I loved everything about the whole crazy project.

For four months, I never left the farm. The amount of work and the setbacks - almost exclusively caused by the bad behaviour of various members of our commune - were as enormous as the mountain-range we were living on.

Then came Halloween; Andy, a juggling friend, was living with us, as were various of the commune children. They all went down to the nearest little one-road town called 'Guayabal' for the festivities there, to participate and to entertain with clowning and singing.

When Andy came back, he told me something I couldn't believe: that a **Green Party** had formed in the area, and that their candidate for the local council had won! And he brought me a letter inviting me down to meet the new Green councillor to prove it. I went, and that's how the Caquetá Rainforest Campaign began.

I sat in the echoing empty hall of the INDERENA office in Guayabal - an ineffectual, supposedly environmental Government organisation. A little black man, Fernando, was chatting fast and nervously to me, hugely impressed with the presence of a 'Gringa' lady in the region who wanted to help them with their new, grassroots, definitely non-governmental environmental campaign. And I sat there, astonished, dazed with what was happening: how could it be that there were people in this stripped, wrecked area who were caring to stop the damage, replant the forests, change people's minds? I could hardly hear what he was saying: my mind was racing around trying to find a way in which I could help them. I realised I had only two weapons: my familiarity with alternative movements in Europe, and my typewriter. "Look, I'll tell the whole of Europe about you," I said. "I absolutely cannot promise anything, but there are an awful lot of people who do care, and who don't know what to do to help. Maybe they will help you here." And so I wrote my first Green Letter.

What resulted was not so much a Green Campaign as a Psychological Resuscitation Programme: Whilst blow after blow fell upon me in my own personal life, involving betrayal, let-down and the downright sadism of various English and Irish people surrounding me, a flood of incredible good energy started to pour in from abroad. Having thought, 'Right, there is no hope from people, I might as well turn to trees', what I discovered was that an awful lot of people who care for trees, care for people.

There are two tightly-packed files on my desk. The first, smaller one contains all the 'Green' correspondence of the first year of the campaign; the second, fatter one contains the correspondence of the next 5 months. I am on file three, and as I said in the last Green Letter, our latest enormous gift of seeds and good wishes came from CHINA. Now no matter what assails me in my personal life, I will never let down all the hundreds of people who have cared enough to write, to send gifts of information, encouragement, books, posters, money and seeds. Every time personal negativity or hopelessness assails me, shame jolts me back on to my feet.

At this end of the Campaign, on our 2nd anniversary of entry into the region, these are some of the highlights of our time here:

1. The 'Greening of the FARC'. From a hostile, 'you-can't-set-up-a-green-party-in-a-red-area' stance, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia have now made green policies a natural part of what they stand for: in this region specifically, they foment, support and enthusiastically participate in Green campaigns such as seed distribution and the setting up of a local agricultural college.
2. Small, dedicated and determined groups of peasants have formed themselves into local groups, always with the help of country school-teachers, to try to get 'Green Activities' moving, from humble rubbish-collection and serious indoctrination of the children on environmental matters, to reforestation projects and plans for local 'Green' industries (like sugar-cane processing, a very simple matter, but requiring much labour).
3. Logging for export from the region has ceased.

4. 'Non-green' neighbours, previously bemused by or indifferent to our work, are showing an interest; view our gardens with admiration, and request information and seeds to start their own. The social climate for green work could hardly be better.

5. The terrible news of the murder of Luis, a colleague of mine and Colombian environmentalist many days' journey from here, is something I constantly 'use' as I know he would want me to. Just yesterday, I took advantage of the fact the FARC are launching a region-wide campaign to arrest, detain, re-educate and set free corrupt local officials, to denounce once more, on paper, the suspected master-mind of my friend Luis's murder. Justice is very slow in Colombia, and mostly non-existent unless you push very hard indeed.

6. And, last but not least, I present the example of our own farm, which from producing nothing but mud and a bit of spinach two years ago, now feeds a busy commune of hungry kids and adults three superb meals daily, and has been doing so for over 18 months. We are the living example that small and intensive **works** - as long as you work too!

Half an hour ago, my 15 year old daughter Louise (who has never been to school) said, 'I've written a song for our anniversary.' I can't send you the sweet melody over the air waves, but here are the words: -

MOTHER WITCH

A long time ago
When this world was a magical place
When people gathered in the meadow
To chant to mother Nature and pray

When witches were the doctors
When horses were the cars
When the earth was our goddess
And our only guides were the stars..

No aeroplanes in the skies
No rubbish in the seas
Spells to keep our spirits high
And plants to cure our bodies,

Men that feared witches' power
Put an end to their lives
Year after year
They burnt them alive.

Now the earth is the witch

Her power stronger than men's
Men are still burning her,
But she'll get her revenge

I wish us all a happy anniversary, and many more to come. And once again I send out a huge
'Thankyou' to all our unknown friends
- and some very wellknown ones! - for continuing to be the life-blood and heart-beat of this extremely
rewarding work.
Love to you all,
Jenny James

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10 unexpected visitors visit our 'eco-park'...

GREEN LETTER No. 12, 16th August 1996

CAQUETÁ RAINFOREST CAMPAIGN,

To all good greenfolk, Greetings!

A week and a half ago, on 5th August, it was the first anniversary of the murder of my friend Luis Arenas Hurtado, a man of 63 and a brave, lone, environmental worker in the hot regions of Caquetá. In my time of mourning, I wrote him a poem in Spanish, which was given to his wife, relatives, friends - and sent to his murderers (along with the poem translated in Green Letter No.9). Here is a literal translation of it:

Luis: After your murder, a terrible silence;
Just the echo, repeated to Eternity
Of the 19 cowardly bullets that killed you
And the cackles of your killers.

Luis: After the silence,
We awoke from the shock;
And there began a murmur:
Who? and Why?

Luis: After the murmur, a clamour:
NO! No, this murder is **not** going to be buried in silence;
The murder of a man who protected the Living
Is going to breed more life.
Your red blood, the red blood of a 'green' man,
Your red blood is going to make fertile
The desert that Caquetá is becoming.

Luis: After the clamour, a shout:
A shout so loud, announcing the death
Of another great tree,
Of another irreplaceable giant
Fallen to the ground;
A shout so loud, that it will reach
Even the deaf ears
Of those who thought forever
To silence you.

Luis: After the shouting, the work:
Work for the forests and the rivers,
For the animals and the children,
Work against your murderers, who
In killing you
Aggressed against Nature herself.

Luis: After the work,
Silence once again.
But the tranquil silence
That follows work well done.
This is our promise to you.

When we began this Campaign two years ago, I valued as 'work' only that which made my hands and feet muddy and my back ache; anything less was only playing, so I thought. But I worked so hard, I have permanently injured a shoulder and arm; yet in the despair of enforced 'retirement' from our gardens, something new has flowered in this time of 'midsummer' creativity: last year, it was our 'Teatro Verde', Green Theatre, which I hardly mentioned in the Green Letters, thinking no serious environmentalist would want to know of such frivolity. This year, our theatre has become an astonishing flowering of the 'mental' aspect of what I now accept as environmental 'work': work with the schools of the region, 'work' through songs and poems and the children's exquisite art, 'work' through the contacts Anne makes on her Astrology tours: my rather narrow concept of what this campaign would be (saving trees) is being broadened daily as people's responses carry me off into a wide green stream of creativity.

Recently, I was sorting through old letter files in preparation for writing a book on our years in Colombia, and I came across a dream my daughter Rebecca had written down in April 1992; here it is:

"I am with a group of people. We are all doctors and we're on a mission to do some healing. I'm told there is somebody in great need. I am standing in an open space with a woman. She says to me: Are you aware of how big this project is? She then points over towards a very odd-looking mountain.

"Suddenly I realise that the mountain I'm looking at is an eye, and that we are standing on somebody's face. We are all very small. Then I look in another direction and see the shape of a gigantic mouth. The woman I'm with tells me that the wound this person has is a long way away and that it will take days to get there. What I'm standing on is the cheek of the body.

"As I told Jenny this dream, I realised that it was about a healing journey to save Planet Earth."

And now a report from Anne:

I have recently returned from a brief trip to Chorreras (the main community we work with) and Guayabal (the nearest and only little one-street town). In Guayabal, I called at the offices of *Corpoamazonia*, the government body who are supposed to be caring for the ecology of the region. I wanted to ask them why it was that after the supposed logging ban, there were still so many lorries leaving the area carrying wood. Their local representative wasn't there, but members of the National Parks Committee who share the office answered my questions. Corpoamazonia issues permits to cut wood supposedly under strict terms that the loggers plant 10 trees for every tree felled and do not clear-cut. However, the permits are being issued without any follow-up work or checking and then, horror of horrors, are being **recycled**, as the wood yards in Neiva don't stamp them. A nightmare. And of course no-one wants to stick their neck out and intervene as they're all scared - fear is the national Colombian disease which allows a dozen murders a day while lips are sealed and eyes averted.

After I left the office, I was offered a lift in ... a wood lorry, by Martin, the head of the Guayabal Co-op. who handles the wood trade; he is also a local Communist leader. I felt rather wound up about the whole issue and got into his lorry with my hackles bristling. It was an awkward situation as he was being friendly and insisted we stop at his home for coffee and soup. When we got back into the lorry, I asked why so much

wood was still being cut and what about the logging ban? I expected an argument but instead he half-groaned and complained that Corpoamazonia weren't doing their job and that the problem was 'falta de educación', - lack of education - and there was no replanting, and he very heartily agreed it was a tragedy and that we, the people, need to do something about it. On my next trip to Bogotá in a few days' time, I will try to meet the head of Corpoamazonia and politely put some pressure on them.

The last time I was in Bogotá, through my astrology work, I met a 54-year-old woman who had spent most of her life running a national television corporation and who has now turned her energy towards green work and wants to buy forest to save it in our area. As we talked about the possibility of her living here some of the time, her brother (the Colombian ambassador to Iran!) said that for people of their class to move here would be to risk kidnap and robbery. She answered, "Of course, we could spend all day going through the reasons why it's impossible, but we have to begin somewhere making peace in this country, and I'm willing to die in the attempt."

When I told her that the main cash crop around here is opium poppy, thinking this would put her off, she said with great feeling: "Tell me about it. We've lived that problem in this family through blood, sweat and tears."

Her husband had died nine months ago of heroin addiction.

My whole fortnight's astrology trip to Bogotá to earn 'green' money, turned very green indeed: Jenny had asked me to find educational materials for the local schools. I tentatively began to ask ecological foundations and governmental organisations and suddenly found myself being swamped with materials, offers of help, moral support, appreciation and love, and all because I told people we grow our own food, try to buy forest and help local people to stop growing opium poppies. An example: I went timidly into a very posh new building of something called the 'Presidencia de la Republica'. The lady in there treated me like a V.I.P., called in all her colleagues and immediately set about collecting posters and booklets for us. When I returned to collect them, she handed me a huge bag of new medical drugs for our area. We gave them to a local doctor-friend in Guayabal, telling him to use them for people who couldn't afford to pay.

At the 'Presidencia' office, I was then bombarded with more offers of help and told to bring a taxi the next time I go back to carry all the stuff! It seems that all Colombian institutions have a press office where they give away posters and booklets, so I came home laden with boxes of material on such subjects as personal health-care and organic agriculture written especially for 'campesinos', clearly and concisely and with attractive illustrations. Because there is an almost impassable chasm between urban and rural Colombia, these well-meaning office people are delighted to hand over their posters, videos and booklets to people who are 'out there doing it', so we certainly intend to satisfy them still further in the future!

(Jenny writing now) This whole 'Bogotá dimension' of the forest campaign has been a source of amazement to me. I spent a delicious day or two feverishly reading, organising and packing into a dozen bundles the material Anne brought home, and then Mary Kelly, who had faithfully spent months working on kitchen and garden to such an extent that she's hardly known in this area, went on her maiden voyage to our campesino and political contacts to distribute the educational, visual and practical goods. Reception of such gifts is so childlike and full of wonder - even in local farmers one would normally regard as

hardened and cynical - that the appetite it creates in us to do more and more is just one of the many magical marvels of this work.

When Anne returned from her exhausting months of work in Ecuador to pay for endangered forest above us, one of the first things we did was to send her up to see the land she'd just saved. This is what she wrote:

'I was eager to see what I'd bought! Orlando, the devil-may-care ex-owner collected me early in the morning and we climbed on horse-back for 40 minutes, first through our farm, and then crossed a stream that borders the new acquisition. I was in heaven. I spend so much time in the cities working to buy land that I forgot exactly what it is I'm earning **for**. My trip to Orlando's land reminded me: as we climbed up into the clearing which contains Orlando's shack (his 'palace' as he calls it), all I could see around me were hectares of enormous trees, true giants. Orlando led me round what was only a tiny fraction of our boundaries, often cutting a new path through the undergrowth on near-vertical slopes of forest as I scrabbled after him. From one vantage point, I could see into the next valley, uninhabited, just rolling hills of forest. All the farms we have bought form a line of several kilometres guarding entry into that valley. There is only one gap in the line, a small path that is for sale for about £1.000. Its acquisition will complete this part of our planned protection belt.

'Orlando then led me through more virgin forest towards his 'lulo' patch (an indigenous citric fruit-plant like a gigantic thistle laden with golden balls, that make an unsurpassed fruit drink): a huge expanse he's cut and burnt to sow this very commercially-worthwhile crop, all the while swearing to the angels that he never sows 'amapola' (poppy) because he believes in God. In his lulo patch, I notice some very pretty flowers - opium poppy. "And this?" I ask innocently. He swears they're wild. I laugh. He grins sheepishly. They are wild now, as they're on our land. We pick lulos and wild mint and climb exhausted back to his 'palace'. He shows me a 'borrugo' lair (a wild animal - translation unknown) and points out all kinds of wild birds we don't see further down the mountain at our lower, inhabited altitude. And he keeps complaining provocatively that Jenny made him leave his hunting rifle at our farm: he'd arrived in the morning brandishing it and saying he was going to kill a 'tigre'. Jenny had said smartly, "Oh no you aren't, we've just bought that land from a neighbour (him!) and now it's a wild-life sanctuary." "Well said," answered Orlando appreciatively; an Aries like Jenny, he loves a bit of confrontation!

'When we reached his shack, the rain kept us from going onwards, so we sat in the open-sided 'kitchen' talking. Between quizzing me about my love-life and almost crying about his young wife leaving him for the bright city lights, Orlando told me something that once and for all made my long trip to Ecuador worthwhile. After doing the land-deal with us, he had gone to the local Co-op and belatedly received a 'salvoconducto', that is: permission to cut and sell his timber. I looked at the giants surrounding us and breathed very deeply.'

(Jenny reporting now) Work with Chorreras and other local communities took a leap ahead recently with all the magnificent environmental teaching materials arriving from Bogotá, and also through an early idea of mine coming to fruition: direct contact between schoolchildren here and in Europe by letter. Mrs. Cynthia Dickinson of Wakefield, Yorkshire, has been superbly helpful in this, though the wear and tear on my brain and eyesight was considerable as I translated 60 English children's letters, between 8 and 11

years of age - it wasn't easy finding comprehensible Spanish terms for CDs and keyboards and details of England losing some football match - my 35 years of Spanish-speaking hadn't previously led me into such areas! We now have a list of the 20 rural schools in this area and intend gradually to extend our work to all of them. Here are some words from our main schools contact, Camilo, the young teacher of Chorreras, whose even younger wife trudged up our difficult track with her new baby recently to spend a few days with us while her husband was at a week-long teachers' course spreading the 'green word':

“Dear friend Jenny, I hope with all my heart that you and everyone in your community are well and finding every success in all your work. My pupils and I want to thank you for the translation of our letters and for sending them abroad; the children are excited and wanting to write more.

“Jenny, next week in the teachers' meeting I will be promoting the idea of seed distribution and of improving this region; I shall sow in the teachers the seed of loving our Nature and of consciousness of what we have in this region.”

He also sent me a very detailed survey he had personally undertaken of every aspect of life in Chorreras. I will be happy to send a translation of this to anyone who wishes to get more involved with work in this community.

I know that Mrs. Kathleen Jannaway of the Vegan Association will forgive me for pinching the following quote from her booklet 'Growing Our Own':

“Society has always had its visionaries who talked of love and beauty, peace and plenty; but somehow the “practical“ men have always been there to praise the smog as a sign of progress, to preach just wars and restrict love while giving full reign to hate.

“It must be one of the greatest ironies of the history of Homo Sapiens that today the only solution for the “practical“ men lies in what they regard as the dreams of idealists.

“The question now is, 'Can the “realists“ be persuaded to face reality in time?’

(Paul Erlich, Prof. of Biology, Stanford)“

A fortnight ago, Anne and I were about to eat a quiet midday meal together: everyone else was away. Suddenly I heard voices and thought I was hallucinating as I viewed **ten** people wind their muddy way up our track towards the farm. I didn't know any of them. They were all chatting and joking amiably, two were chubby young women. They were workers from the weather-damaged unsurfaced road down in the valley who had heard there was an 'ecological park' and that it was 'muy bonito' - very pretty. So in they came. That was the moment I had my suspicions confirmed that Anne is a witch. Without missing a beat, she converted our two humble dinners into ten for this sweating lusty crew. And then we spent a long

afternoon with them showing them round the vegetable gardens, explaining the mysterious crops to them - though a couple of them were very knowledgeable - introducing them to our magic compost-producing factory (the hen and guinea-pig run), giving friendly speeches on our whys and wherefores and playing music, nervously, to be reciprocated, nervously, by the oldest of them who sang beautifully to the guitar. It was a lovely afternoon, which included giving them seeds for hot and cold country - they came from all over Colombia - and pairs of guinea-pigs for breeding. As they left, they said, "We have **twenty** fellow workers who would like to come up, that's alright isn't it?"

On our isolated farm, it is perfectly possible to go for several weeks without seeing a single soul from outside.

Ten minutes to sun-fall (it doesn't set, it disappears), time to go. I want to thank Cynthia Dickinson once again for all her good-natured and caring work on behalf of the Campaign, and also most especially Andreas Graf of Berlin for his constant support and practical help in making links and reproducing these Green Letters; also for the excellent several-page article he wrote and had published about us in German in the high-quality magazine of the ZEGG community in Germany. And thank you ZEGG for devoting so many pages to us.

I would like to end with a plea for my beleaguered daughter Becky in Ireland upon whose shoulders falls the willingly-performed task of co-ordinating this Campaign from Co. Donegal: would regular recipients of the Green Letters who really don't have any sustained interest in them, please let her know so she can reduce her huge mailing list; and would any enthusiastic recipients please let her have some postage stamps from time to time as I know she spends all her meagre income on postal costs. Thankyou.

Love to everyone. It's exciting isn't it?

Jenny James

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GREEN LETTER FROM COLOMBIA No. 13

1st October 1996, Rovira, Caquetá

Goodbye to our friend Ricardo

Regular readers of these Green Letters will remember the name of Ricardo, our neighbour who was felling forest near us, which two generous English people enabled us to save eventually with their donation.

After our brush with Ricardo over the forest cutting, and after we had secured the rest of his beautiful mountainside, he became a closer and closer friend. He started putting up lovely maps I gave him of the Amazon basin, accepting with interest environmental literature, considering seriously converting his horrible noisy discotheque in Rovira into a 'green' cultural centre, and supporting us hugely during the difficult time of making a video on 'CRAC' - details further on. He also became Anne's companion as he had recently divorced, and in every way was a good neighbour, friend and helper.

Ricardo was found dead in his farm next to ours on 18th September. For once - unusual in Colombia - it was not a murder. Ricardo had been fainting a lot recently, though a huge strong young man of 35, and he died of a brain haemorrhage. I was in Bogotá at the time - the first time for 8 years, a hellpit of environmental pollution - trying to get treatment for a muscular seize-up that seems to be taking over my body. The news was unreal. I came home immediately. Rovira is a very desolate place without him, no way of replacing him, no 'home' to arrive at, hot and tired from long journeys. A massive display of funeral flowers, and no Ricardo. Another year, another death - barely time to recover from Luis's murder. This time, nearer to home and felt daily, and no political significance to impart energy as in an assassination, the blow is very deadening.

A Film gets made of our campaign

We have Ricardo on video, talking about the environmental and social problems of the region. This is how the film happened. Washing up one day (outdoors), I looked up to our entry-path to see two very tall, bare-chested luggage-less Europeans cantering along the track. As they came marching up towards me,

one of them said, 'Hello, we took the wrong turning for Inishfree' - that's the island our community lived on in Ireland in the '70s and '80s. The lads were young and Irish and soon admitted they had come to make a film of the Rainforest Campaign - they had read about us in a visitor's book in a 'gringo' boarding house in Bogotá, met Mary Kelly who was visiting Government and other institutions for us at the time, read the Green Letters, and decided to take the plunge

After a month of technical disasters, every conceivable mishap from no-one wanting to lend mules to none of them knowing how to run the generator so laboriously brought up here, I asked John and Declan: are you still glad about your decision? They are both incurable optimists - they needed to be - and grinned with great enthusiasm that it had been wonderful. The Colombian television crew they hired to make the film would not, I think, agree. Their rather corpulent young sound man had obviously never seen mud or vegetarian food before, and although he smiled obligingly throughout their time here, he reported to the restaurant lady in Rovira that it had been a 'nightmare'. The only thing - and the most important thing - that never went wrong was human relations and tempers, which remained astonishingly good throughout. As I said to John one day: Anyone sensitive working near you two is forced to have a nervous breakdown as both of you refuse to!

They say they are delighted with the material collected, which included interviews with Cliomedes, Camilo the teacher and Roberto of Chorreras, and a surprise addition to our campaign: the police inspector (a bureaucratic position, not wielding anything like the power this would imply in England) of Balsillas, the 'border settlement' as you enter Caquetá from Neiva, who insisted on being interviewed and told the horror story of the deforestation of Balsillas: now an immense treeless cattle-feeding plain.

Our personal nightmare brought about by the film was quite different: it was nerve-wracking and harrowing to witness at close quarters how technology definitely doesn't work unless pampered and molly-cuddled - luxuries not available in the rainforest - but the social problems caused, or rather brought to light, were what affected us.

I believe the peasant uprisings in Caquetá have become world news recently. Shall we say, it was an **interesting** time to bring in a television crew whose aims included filming and referring to opium-poppy growing as part of the environmental problem. ..

We are ordered to a meeting with the FARC regional command

John and Declan came stumbling up the dark muddy mountainside after one of the usual technical breakdowns they'd had to sort out, arriving exhausted to wake me near midnight with the news: 'Jenny, the regional commander of the FARC wants to see us, we have to leave before dawn.' I had sworn I'd never go down that track again, my health being poor and my tolerance for involvement in modern civilisation nil, but this was a situation I had to handle. I had noticed that our new local commander was exceptionally offhand, 'busy' and unfriendly when I'd tried to talk to him about the film on several occasions and I'd longed for the days of Commander Enrique.

We arrived in Rovira before hardly anyone was up, but Ricardo had been there to greet us. He took me aside and said, 'Jenny, could I come too?' 'Of course!' I was delighted to have his support. We picked up more people on the way - a contact in Guayabal, then my own beloved 'Family' in Chorreras, Camilo, Cliomedes and Roberto, all of whom gave up a day's vital work to come and support us. We arrived at the appointed meeting place and had to wait several hours; I noted the priest and several other key community members were there. I tried talking to Edwin, the new Commander, again, and got the same eyes-to-the-floor mumbled response. But my body registered no alarm whatsoever.

The meeting was very formal. I was invited to speak first and did so, explaining our intentions and aims. The regional commander, a small, polite, dark-skinned, extremely unaggressive man, then gave a speech which was absolutely nothing whatever to do with what I had said and was simply a very elementary introduction to their political philosophy and policy. I immediately understood that the meeting was simply to re-establish who's who in the region, i.e. they are in charge, and there was no conflict. But then a local man I'd heard of when we first lived here as saying, 'we were not to be trusted because we were gringos and gringos only come to dig for gold and emeralds and steal them', and whom I had subsequently sought out and spoken to and explained our *raison d'être* in the region, and who had seen me at environmental meetings and knew jolly well what I was doing here, spoke up with a load of baloney about us being here to steal 'resources.' The 'resources' we were stealing this time were evidently the 'beauty of the region' by putting it on film, which would 'earn us loads of money'. Having had to lend Declan and John the money for their cameraman's fare to Neiva, this didn't go down too well with me at the time. I answered back clearly and well, but the encounter did not raise my love quotient for the man, and left me in a bad mood for some days to come, until I wrote a long and detailed political document to the FARC, explaining my position and attitudes and experience in detail, and sending a copy to Victor, my opponent. I think I passed my bad mood on, as I felt better after that.

Signs of local aggression and discontent

The film was over, and Declan and John and their culture-shocked crew were safely back in Bogotá - if 'safe' is a term you can use for living in poisoned air - and I returned to the farm after Ricardo's death, sad and ill. Then our hand-painted signs all the way along the 3 hour track to the farm started getting damaged, disappearing, or being covered with mud. At first we suspected my daughter's very angry ex-boyfriend, and indeed he was one of the culprits, but when I asked an elderly evangelist neighbour, Don Carlos, for help in the matter, I was met with an extraordinary blast of: 'the people' are doing it because those signs could show the way to spies and police and army because you have filmed the poppy-growing'. Well, that's a synopsis of an intense half-hour discussion in which I mentioned that the whole world knew that opium-poppy was being grown in Colombia and that our interest was to explain *why* so that the Americans couldn't get away with pointing their fingers - and their aeroplanes - at Colombian peasants and calling them 'narcotraffickers' and blaming them for the urban world's ills. I'm not sure how much went in, but our signs aren't being destroyed any more. It feels like a very uphill month.

Declan and John are translating the film into English, Spanish and Irish, so it should be widely available. They have promised to send us a copy; I hope it will create a little understanding as to what we are trying

to do. So far it has served to unearth semi-dormant aggressive theories about us - and also a lot of friendship we didn't know we had.

News of our Irish support branch

Meanwhile at our support-branch in Ireland, my eldest daughter Becky ran the Caquetá Rainforest Festival between 10th and 17th August. Several people who attended have sent me detailed reports, leaving the impression that it was well-attended, including by many people from mainland Europe, with lots of music, talks, films, dance and discussion. About 1,900 U\$ was collected for the campaign, shortly to be brought here by Magdalena, our returning Colombian helper who has been in Ireland for over two years. The only problem is continuity after the fun is over; Becky badly needs regular live-in help at our house in Burtonport, a lovely place to live for anyone who wants to get away from the towns.

The Disaster of Official Environmental Organizations

In the last Green Letter, Anne talked of how the wood lorries are trundling out of this region once more. I hoped she was wrong. Then I heard them in the night - the sound travels right up to our farm through the clear mountain air. And then when we were down in Chorreras filming, there they were, loading up. It seems the net result of the entry of 'Corpoamazonia', the Government environmental organisation, into this area, has been to reintroduce logging - with 'permits': as if the monkeys and the birds and the trees will feel better about it for that. Then on 5th September, this report appeared in 'El Espectador', the national liberal daily paper:

'Environment of Catastrophe in the Regional Environmental Institutions.'

'A document on forestry policy was described in the House of Representatives yesterday as a 'pretty document without any chance of becoming reality' by the directors of the regional environmental corporations. '

'Each director gave account of the situation in his region and expounded upon the forest problem; day after day, they said, they were losing battles in the face of deforestation or simply hadn't even been able to begin work. The common denominator was the scarcity of funding...

'No programme seems to have functioned, for which reason it was concluded that environmental legislation needed 'reforesting'.

'The debate confirmed that there is an environmental catastrophe. "With the cut-backs in spending - another of 6,000 million pesos has been announced - the Government is not seriously thinking about Life and with the environmental corporations in danger, inevitably the whole national environmental system is as well."

So that's why I toss and turn in anguish at night listening to the wood lorries. Sorry, I should have put a health warning at the beginning of this Green Letter: 'Anyone with a tendency to depression should have an optimistic friend handy.'

Wind-up from the British Embassy

And here's another: a few months ago, Anne was astonished when in Bogotá to have the British Embassy phone her up - somehow they'd heard of our work - and offer funding for local projects 'tending to substitute illegal crops and protect the environment.' She got the forms and Cliomedes wrote out a fairly modest project for Chorreras. We tried not to raise their hopes, but everyone's human. The project was reviewed at the Embassy, but meanwhile the consul Anne had been dealing with had changed. The answer came back: 'There's no funding available.' Anne has taken the project to another Embassy.

A Song from our Irish film-makers

One of the days when Declan and John were here, and their camera crew were elsewhere chasing batteries and generator parts, we decided to put on a rehash of the 3 hour theatre we once did in Rovira. It was John's 26th birthday. He and Declan surprised us by providing several skits and songs themselves. Here are some excerpts from a song they performed called "Dying to Do a Documentary" - you have to imagine it in a lovely Irish accent.

There's scorpions in me sleepin' bag
Guerrillas in the night
I should have listened to my mother
Y' know she's always right...
When your van breaks down in Neiva
When there's no mules left in sight
When the landslides gettin' nearer
And you're runnin' outa light
When the mosquitoes are gettin' hungry
And the guerrilla runs the show
When there's scorpions in your sleeping bag
And there's nowhere left to go
When the battery belt is running out
And you're feelin' that way too
When the generator's packed it in
And you've gone an' caught the 'flu
When the locals all have machetes
When you go where men don't go
When the FARC-EP want to see ye
And you're sure you can't say no
When your sound man's done a runner

And the keys are locked in the van
When you're feelin' like a gonner
And things won't go to plan
When your Visa card is briste* (*Irish for broken*)
And your travellers' cheques are through
When you don't know what day it is
An' you haven't got a clue
When the gods are all agin ye
And nature takes the piss
When the odds are stacked above ye
Lie back and think of this:
You should have listened to your mother,
You know she's always right...

Introducing the Howler Monkeys

Sometimes in the mornings here, an unearthly chorus starts up in the forest. It is the howler monkeys. The children had been to see them several times and reported they were huge red-haired, unafraid creatures who stared at the little white 'monkeys' beneath them. Recently the noise came again and the children rushed off - the very steep hill between us and the forest had always put me off, but this time, my little Katie came signalling out of the forest that they were still there and we should come. Mary and I ran up, further and further into the forest where my grandson stood silently 'guarding' the monkeys who were unconcernedly getting on with their lives over 50 foot up in the giant trees. We stayed there a long time that morning, our necks aching watching them. There in the forest, it seemed like the only reality, yet when we came home, it took only a few minutes to reach the edge of that world, where the forests end forever.

If any of you would like to come out and help to slow down the destruction of that forest world, there is endless space here and no end of practical things to do. We could particularly use people versed in the physical healing arts at the moment - and robust mortals to take on farmwork as the older of us fall by the wayside.. And if you ever go across the sea to Ireland ... please remember a little place called Burtonport in Co. Donegal where there is a half-Spanish lady needing help and company in her work for CRAC.

All of you who have written and sent helpful books and loving encouragement - thankyou! and goodbye for now,
Jenny James

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Green Letter No. 14, 15th November 1996

To all Green Groups, Parties and Activists Worldwide: Greetings from Caquetá, Colombia.

I would forgive my readers for thinking I've made the next bit of this story up.

On 6th November, I went down to the horrid hot town of Neiva: I never do this unless I absolutely have to; my gum had swollen up badly and I assumed I needed a dentist. Leaving the house of the friend I stay with early next morning to find a surgery, I was stopped in my tracks by the headline in the local Neiva newspaper: "Alcalde Implicado en Muerte de Gobernador" which means: **Mayor implicated in Death of Governor**. I rushed over to read the small print, but I already knew: it was the Alcalde of Milan, Ricardo Leyva, who, readers of Green Letter No. 6 may remember, was also highly suspected of being the murderer of my environmentalist friend, Luis Arenas of Milan, Caquetá.

I have also mentioned on occasion that I am an atheist, and I make feeble attempts to cling to a scientific explanation of the universe. Would anyone like to try a rational explanation as to why I, who perhaps once a year leave my farm for the city, should land myself in Neiva the day my sworn enemy, the Alcalde of Milan, is taken into custody by the Public Prosecutor of Bogotá for questioning in connection with the murder of a much more "important" person than my friend Luis?

I did not go to the dentist, and the swelling disappeared. I took a taxi in the opposite direction: to the head office of the newspaper "La Nacion". I quietly but insistently told their chief everything I knew about Luis's murder. He was totally receptive and taped everything I said. He knew not only the Alcalde (Mayor) of Milian, but also Diogenes, Luis's brother-in-law, who wrote a moving letter to Amnesty International (sent out with Green Letter No. 6) at the time of Luis's murder.

Then the newspaper director took me to Caracol, one of Colombia's TV and radio news services, and I repeated all I knew. Then they gave me the phone and let me phone Luis's sister Betty in Florencia. "Have you seen the news" I said. "Of course!" she answered. "What is the attitude of Luis's family now to talking?" I asked - they had literally been frightened to death before to talk to the police. "We are thinking of talking." - "Will you give me permission to talk?" I asked. "YES!" came the answer. The newspaper head man wanted me to go to the Fiscalia with him that afternoon - that's the Public Prosecutor. Betty also told me that after the Mayor of Milan had received my two poems, 'To Luis's Assassins' (published in Green Letters 9 & 12), he had threatened that 'if anything happened to him, not one but several of Luis's family would die'. "Oh my god!" I said, "So are you against what I did?" - "No" she said. What a strange mixture of understandable fearfulness and extraordinary bravery Colombians are.

I was worried my purely 'hearsay' evidence would appear absurd. That I was making y fool of myself. That my dubious legal status, living in guerrilla territory, would be uncovered. But I went to the Fiscalia (Public Prosecutor) with the newsman. The first Fiscal said: 'Oh, we thought she had information in connection with the Governor's murder.' So, it's not to be, I thought. But they took me to a man higher up. He was more interested, and took me to a third. In the end I was sitting with a whole bevy of them. They were all debating the pros and cons of me making a statement, at least that's what I thought. Finally I said: "Look, am I wasting your time?" - "No!" they all said. They'd simply been discussing when, how, and under what auspices I should speak. We agreed on 9 o'clock next morning.

It was evening. At home, far away on the farm, I had a handful of papers, letters, notes that would be so useful now. No way to get them before morning. Then I remembered that Anne had copies of most of the material in Bogota - but I didn't know her address or telephone number, as she had just moved. I tried a hunch: a 'gringo' lodging house in the only bearable quarter of Bogotá, Candelaria, - I knew the owner often knew where Anne was. He wasn't in. With extreme urgency, I begged the woman at the other end of the phone to do anything she could to get Anne in touch with me. Then I prepared to sink into a depression, knowing I wouldn't get those papers by morning.

"Jenny - phone!" It was all of 3 minutes later. "How the hell did you know to phone me?" I asked Anne. "I was somewhere working and felt the urge to phone the flat - and your message was there", she said. Sometimes having witches as friends is exceptionally useful.

Anne was with me by morning, with Luis's last letter to me, written 3 hours before he died; with his letter to the Mayor of Florencia written 2 weeks before he was killed, saying he feared for his life; with copies

of my poems 'To his assassins'; with letters to me from his family; and with photos of Luis. I was about to risk all to get justice for him. I prayed that it was not his family I was risking.

Again, nerves and doubt that my testimony was absurd, meaningless: I had never even met the Mayor of Milan, and here was I trying to make sure he stayed in prison. I spoke for over an hour into a recorder. The Prosecutors couldn't have treated me better. For the first time since I came to Colombia eight years ago, I gained some respect for Colombian justice: that there are people trying to make the system work. They told me that each of the members of Luis's family that I mentioned would be approached to give testimony, and that if they refused, matters would rest there. They said that my evidence could help enormously in nailing the accused in his other offence. Then I asked if the day would ever come when Ricardo Leyva had to know of my existence and identity. The man's eyes fell. "Oh," I said, "he will have to know, then." - "Yes", he looked at me straight, "that is Colombian law." - "Fine, then so be it." I left, completely satisfied that for now, I had done everything in my power to get justice for Luis Erasmo Arenas, murdered 5th August 1995 for his environmental work.

A poem from Louise, 15:

Talk To Me, Old Tree

Tall and broad tree
That gives me so much shade
You are much older than me
Yet you don't look afraid.

But deep in your heart
You listen to that sound
You know it is not too far
Where trees are falling to the ground.

That man could come and kill you
I hear the chainsaw clear
I don't care what I have to do
I won't let that man come near.

With your roots deep in the earth
And your leaves high in the sky
Since the minute of your birth
You've listened to Mother Earth cry.

You keep all her secrets,
You feel all her pain:
Tell me more about her, old tree,

Or tell me the same things again.

A Visitor from Germany doesn't like us much..

We had a visitor from Europe last week, a supporter from Germany who has helped us by reproducing and distributing Green Letters in his part of the world as he is a computer expert. I found him on the farm when I returned from my interview with the Prosecutor in Neiva, and I found him ready to leave. Andreas did not like it here. I asked him to write a 'Warning' to all future visitors from his point of view. Here are the relevant points! -

"I'm sure you won't like this place:

1. if you place more value on scientific and technological than on practical work,
2. if you are not going to talk about your emotions, and
3. if you are not used to chopping firewood with a big axe. This is extremely dangerous. You might loose the top of your thumb."

(He did.) He added that "you would like it here if :

1. you are looking for a place that is really far, far away from modern society and
2. if you want to experience a lifestyle that is based on hard physical and emotional work."

I actually thought all this was self-evident from my Green Letters, but evidently not, and poor Andreas seemed on the point of nervous breakdown just climbing the hill - it *is* a steep mountain, even for people in their 30s like Andreas.

But a Colombian Visitor Does...

Someone else in their 30s came from Europe too: Magdalena Lasprilla, who had spent two years helping Becky run the campaign in Ireland. Magda is Colombian and has lived with us for many years. She came home with a 5 month old baby and climbed the mountain happily, also went down it again with Louise to visit all the people we work with in the local communities of Chorreras and Guayabal, who listened fascinated to her as she gave impressions of Ireland and what it feels like to live in Europe - not

a very positive picture. While Magda was in Guayabal, she chanced to witness a rather dramatic local scene, which I asked her to write up. Although it is not a 'Green' issue, I thought it very significant as it pertains to local guerrilla management of a criminal act, and as, for the moment, they are the authority around here, continuance of our work depends on their attitudes and ways of operating. Here is a translation of Magda's account:

Local FARC Justice

"I witnessed personally how the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) brought to justice a man of 32 who had raped and threatened with a rifle a girl of 11 in the hamlet of La Unión (near Chorreras). All the people met in a football field in Guayabal, about 200 people, men, women and children. A female guerrilla commander presided over the matter. In front of everyone they placed the man, tied in chains, with a big notice pinned to him which said: "I am a violator of minors."

The guerrillera then made a series of proposals:

The first was that it was wrong to exile the man from the region as he would continue to commit the same offence elsewhere;

Secondly, that if the people decided he should receive the death penalty, then this would be carried out;

And thirdly, that if they decided against the death penalty, then they should decide what alternative punishment would be imposed.

Some people thought he should be killed, but the majority wanted another rigorous penalty imposed. So the guerrillera ordered the formation of a group of six people who would sign a document representing the decision of the people. Then proposals were heard regarding the punishment. It was finally decided that the man should pay with two months' hard labour for the community, working on road drainage. The work had to correspond to one million pesos (1,000 US \$). A document stating this was written out and signed by the six representatives. Then the individual was released from his chains and handed over to the people."

The (outgoing) FARC commander Edwin was heard to say that if the man repeated the offence, he would be killed.

..And Injustice

Unfortunately people suspected of being informants for the Army do not seem to get any chance of a trial and as far as I know at the moment, are executed without warning. I fear that injustices occur in the

heat of the growing civil war; two men whom I did not know were killed in this manner recently near here. If we get a chance to talk to the new female commander, we intend to ask for more information on this. Having heard recently from our friend Cliomedes that one of the rumours that circulates about us is that we are buying land, not to save trees, but to 'form a military base for the future Yankee invasion', the situation is of some concern to us!

Meanwhile, some 'thankyous' are due:

- To the unknown supporter who sent me a collection of "English Nature" magazines;
- To Kerstin Kimmerl of Berlin who sent DM 100 to save trees;
- To Frodo Pillat and others of ZEGG community in Germany for their donations;
- To Fothergills Seed Company, Ruth Bond in Spain and many others for seeds;
- To John Crossan of the 'One World Centre' in Galway, Ireland for his donation of 156 pounds to save forest;
- To the ZEGG community in Germany for continuing to publish the Green Letters and other articles about us in their magazine in German;
- To the unknown Italian supporter who had a Green Letter translated and published;

I would like to recommend to anyone who is confused about the cocaine trade in Colombia to read a short, excellent, factual booklet produced by the CIIR (Catholic Institute for International Relations), Unit 3, Canonbury Yard, 190a, New North Road, London N1 7BJ, England, called "**Coca, Cocaine and The War on Drugs**" (published 1993 but perfectly up-to-date, price L1.20). I was so relieved to see the truth told so succinctly and objectively, especially regarding the fact that it is the 'First World' that reaps most profits out of this very dirty trade. If ever you find yourself leaning on the comfortable theory that Colombia (and other countries) are responsible for the 'drug problem' in Northern cities, please ask: ***What is it about the life style in the rich world that makes people turn to drugs?*** I have before me a Colombian cartoon: it shows one large nose sniffing 'cocaine' - but the cocaine is the Amazon jungle with all its creatures and forests, leaving a desert in its wake.

Yesterday we were horrified to hear chainsaw sounds and the terrible thud of trees coming from **above** us, which we thought impossible. We sent youngsters running in all directions to discover what was going on followed by us older slower ones. Incredibly, it was exceptional wind conditions - high winds for days reminiscent of Ireland and unknown here - that made the sound seem as if it was in 'our' saved forest. In fact it turned out to be very far up on the 'flat' top of our mountain range to the left - neighbours we know are growing poppy and other crops up there, and cutting forest to do so. So this is our next objective; first we must talk to the neighbours, as they may be completely unwilling to sell; a lengthy, delicate process.

Meanwhile, this is what we have decided to do with recent donations that arrived from the CRAC Festival in Donegal and other sources, amounting to a little over 2,000 US \$: rather than let the money 'rot' - inflation will eat it up if we leave it standing still - , or give it to some horrid bank to use for something nasty, we have worked out a way to circulate it usefully and make it work, whilst we sort out the next forest deal. Essential people to the Campaign like Cliomedes and Roberto of Chorreras are always - like most Colombian peasants - paralysed for lack of everyday living funds, so we decided to give them immediate work and support. So far, we like the feel of what has happened very much: we needed our small fields cut (for our 'transport' - horses, - and our one milking cow), and Cliomedes has a 'trimmer'. He stayed a week with us, worked all day and conversed half the night, learnt loads (so did we), we paid him well, he went away delighted - and left us his machine as a bonus on loan. We have lived for 20 years without a single machine - but, it seems it was either let the fields go back - rapidly - to scrub, or wobble a little on our principles. The money we paid Cliomedes will be put back by us into the Green fund as Anne continues to work, ever more successfully, as an astrologer, always with the bonus that as she tells people what she is working for, she receives mountains of material gear for the region as well as her fee.

To help Anne explain to people what we are doing, I created for her a thick file of photos, children's paintings, poems, plus a simple narrative in Spanish telling the history of the ecological aspect of our community. She reports that the folder is devoured by all and sundry in Bogotá.

In a few days' time, Roberto, who has worked with a chainsaw all his life, will be bringing his machine here. This took a lot of thinking about. Our accommodation is awful (Andreas of Germany will enthusiastically confirm this) and as we get more and more visitors and the gardens are beautiful, it is time to start building more adequate cabins. One thing I never knew about forests until I lived next to one is how many trees fall naturally, all the time. Sometimes several in a day, often an alarming noise. We are going to let a now very 'green' Roberto loose in our forests as he knows everything there is to know about wood and we know very little. His job will be to provide us with building wood from the naturally-fallen trees so that we can improve, extend and increase our accommodation. Again, his wages will be returned to the Tree Fund by us, kept up to date with inflation. Thus, Roberto will get a much-desired chance to spend time with us learning and teaching, he will be paid well, and our settlement will be more attractive to visitors.

More and more local people are making the arduous trek up the mountain to see us; they always go away well-satisfied, armed with vegetables, seeds, homemade wine, a pair of guinea-pigs for mating, cuttings and baby plants for transplanting, Irish music ringing in their ears, and a vision of a simple, lively life-style, impressive 'edible gardens' and excellent cuisine, plus conversations with odd but educated foreigners who see a lot of very good and beautiful things about the Colombia they had taken for granted. In return, we ask them to save all their bottles and jars to bring us, their plastic bags for our next load of gifts to people; their second-grade coffee (unsellable), unwanted fruit for us to make jam and wine and drinks; or to help shoe a horse, bring luggage up the hill - or send a couple of spare unattached men if they know of any! Contact is always excellent, if a little exhausting for us at times - Mary might be in the middle of carrying a sack of compost and covered in muck, or I might be about to collapse into my under-used hammock after a morning's gardening.

Visitors from Outer Space?

On 6th November, my children Alice and Katie (13 and 11 years old) also had some visitors. But they were invisible. It was the night I spent in Neiva thinking I was going to the dentist. The girls were in bed in their own little house, chatting before falling asleep. It was about 9.0 p.m. Suddenly, they say, the 'house', made of wood, plastic and corrugated roofing-felt, began to rattle and shake. This in itself is not unknown here as earth tremors are not uncommon. But this was no earth tremor: the whole house lit up (it was a dark night) very brightly indeed, so they could see every detail of the roof. "It was as if the light was shining out of the floor," they reported. There was no sound except for the rattling of the house, and it lasted 'about 15 minutes'. They were petrified, held hands and waited. Katie reports she 'fell asleep' with the 'light still shining'. They were too scared to call out for Mary or leave the cabin.

A hundred yards down the garden, Mary was in bed in the main cabin, feeling anxious, not knowing why, and says she had a 'sensation of light shining' and got up to stand outside the cabin to see what was going on. Unfortunately, my girls' cabin was too far away for her to know what they were going through. In the next room to her was Alan, deep in a feverish sleep, very ill with a high temperature and bad staphylococcus infection; he is a 39 year old Irishman recently-returned to our community after a long absence, extremely psychic and noted for his exceptional 'lucid dreaming'. He dreamt a UFO had crash-landed nearby and that there was only one survivor, a small fellow with whom he communicated mentally to say: 'It's OK, you'll be OK here, we won't let anyone find you' and the UFO man then proceeded "to call me to get me to cut lots of vegetation to cover up and camouflage the crashed vehicle."

Supplying the Colombian Government with Chinese Cabbage...

On that odd note, I think I'd better end by coming right back down to earth to report that we have finally found a home for our 5 kilos of Chinese hot-country seeds, distribution of which had been a worry for some time: the Colombian government environmental organisation Corpoamazonia has taken them, very gratefully indeed. When Anne was organising this with them at their Bogotá office, they asked if we could acquire 'tree seeds'. "What?" she said, amazed, "But don't the Government supply them?" Eyes to

heaven, a shrug and, “the seeds are always useless”. So I have written to the Henry Doubleday Foundation to see if they can help ... No wonder the wood lorries are still trundling out of this region. With an environmental organisation like that, who needs chainsaws?

In the '60s I used to leaflet door to door for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Now we 'leaflet' with plants and seeds. *Balsillas* is a huge, flat, deforested plain that you pass through as you cross the department boundary between Huila and Caquetá on the way up from Neiva. I noticed that each ugly little shack there had exquisite flowers all around it. So Mary went off there two days ago armed with chive and garlic-chive transplants (the herb is unknown here), sunflower and salsify seeds - and a bag to bring home an Eden of glorious flower-cuttings. She will return there soon to make further contacts; but after the children have done their tour of the local schools taking the pencils, chalk, rubbers and set-squares Anne has squeezed out of the Ministry for Education in Bogotá.

Thankyou so much for all your warm and helpful letters, your books, pamphlets, seeds, information, educational materials - even the stamps on your letters are recycled. Keep writing!

with love to you all,

Jenny James

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Caquetá Rainforest Campaign

Green Letter No. 15, New Year's Eve 1996

Dear Friends of the Green Movement

1996 has ended in a manner most fitting for a campaign dedicated to saving forests: Roberto, our chain-saw-man-turned-green from the hamlet of Chorreras, turned up just before the full moon at the end of November to tell us that a very large extent of forest bordering on our rescued woodlands was about to be sold at an absurdly low price and that large parts would certainly be cleared.

Low the price was indeed, £1,000 for goodness-knows-how-many acres, but any price was too high as we had just allocated most of our funds for various projects. We sent messengers and the messages whizzing: to Anne in Bogota, to Becky in Burtonport, Ireland, to our friends and supporters in Germany and England. It was nerve-wracking. The owner of the land was mad keen for a quick sale and would sell to anyone who came up with the cash. Roberto rushed back to Chorreras and collected \$200 from the Chorreras fund (money we'd originally given them); Alan McGrath of Ireland who was staying with us gave us \$350 of his own money; we still had a little in our fund as long as we didn't need to buy food or postage stamps for a while ..

I fell ill, badly ill. I lived on painkillers for 10 days so as not to compete with the howler monkeys with my screams as some invisible force bayoneted my head every two seconds. Mary rushed up and down to Neiva trying to keep in touch with Anne - no mean journey, three hours each way of steep mountain track, four hours each way in a dusty, unreliable open-sided bus. Then the stifling heat of Neiva which numbs your brain-cells, if you've any left after being shaken around on the dusty winding track with the abyss on one side and never a tree in sight - that's the Department of Huila where the Green movement arrived too late. It is turning to desert before our eyes.

Roberto paid Arnelo, the owner, in small amounts of money and large amounts of chat-up as the money came in. We gave up trying to trace Anne and thought she must have died. Then one day she arrived in Neiva with \$1,800, fruit of the magnificent responses of Cynthia Dickinson of Yorkshire and all the people whose names I don't know who helped her, and our friends of the ZEGG community in Germany. Half an hour after arriving, Anne bumped into Roberto in the street; he was accompanied by the owner of the land, one of those little events we cope with mentally by saying it was 'meant'. The rest of the money was paid, along with what had been borrowed from Chorreras and what was owing to Roberto for recent work. The forest was saved, the Campaign solvent again, and we could all breathe. Anne had even earned

some money from her astrology so we could buy some food, household goods and much needed hardware, not to mention fares for the kids so they could get a break from their very hard work on the farm and go dancing for Christmas.

It seems that once you start a Campaign like this, **you** can't decide the pace at which things move. It has a life and mind of its own. We ask for help and visitors; and so they arrive, as did Amiram, a 61 year old Israeli gentleman who read a letter of mine in 'Positive News', that excellent newspaper with the no-bad-news rule. He turned up in Neiva with only our 'post-box' address in his hand and not a word of Spanish. Not surprisingly, no-one had heard of us. But as the word 'Caquetá' is in our name, he was sent to Florencia, capital of the province of Caquetá, a plane-journey away. And arriving in Florencia, even farther from here than Neiva, naturally no-one had heard of us. But - it was obviously 'meant' - he found someone who spoke English and who said, 'Wait, I'll find out for you.' We still don't know how, but they did find out; and back he came to Neiva, and out to Rovira. In Rovira, Amiram asked for a 'taxi' to our farm. This has become the joke of the decade amongst the peasants of Rovira. One of our neighbours, Pardo, pointed at his mules and said, in stitches, - 'Here's your taxi', and put Amiram's heavy luggage on it. Our Israeli friend had to walk. He arrived in the pitch-darkness with some local labourers and settled in happily.

His visit, along with the increasing number of local people who need accommodating for the night, and the letters I am receiving announcing intended visits, has made it more urgent to improve and extend our little cabins and shacks. So Roberto is coming back next month with his chainsaw, now used for more peaceful, if not less noisy, purposes, to make planks out of one or two of the several million trees surrounding us. Even so, my well-indoctrinated children stare accusingly at me when the saw starts up its terrible racket and stand in reverence and mourning at the sacrilege of utilising trees which they have come to regard as holy. I gently point out that Nature herself clears out a several dozen a week just in our hearing-distance and that it's a bit too chilly to sleep under the stars at night, even for European visitors...

I went with Roberto to see the forest we'd purchased; my grandson Tristan, aged 14, came too. Roberto tells us he was one of the first pioneers of this bit of forest, which means he took out the valuable wood in those days, and made the log paths through the forest jungle. There was no clear-cutting in those days, and without his keen eyes leading us, you'd never know man had set foot there before; with his machete he cut 10 years of undergrowth for hour upon hour, re-finding an invisible track he had once known and eventually, when we were stumbling with tiredness, brought us triumphantly to a stream and said, "There! That forest up there and that clearing is what we've just saved!"

We could see the forest all right: an endless ocean of gently swaying giants. But a clearing? Tristan and I looked at each other puzzled.

"Look!" insisted Roberto, pointing to a forest of tall trees near us. Our eyes slowly tuned in to the fact that it was new-growth forest. The good news that all the doom-reports don't reflect is that in these parts, in

just a decade, cut forest renews itself with almost unimaginable speed if left to its own devices. And so, to our innocent eyes, there was no 'clearing'.

Apart from running the farm, our time at the moment is taken up with preparation for the Green Theatre we are to perform in Guayabal, the nearest country centre (hardly a 'town') on 18th January. From shy and tentative beginnings a year ago, we are now branching out brazenly to include unashamed 'Green' messages in many poems, songs, plays, skits and comedies, mostly enacted by the children. This song by Fin Costello, one of the Irishmen living here, I have translated into Spanish to be rendered by him (with his hair-raising accent which the Colombians find charming!).

Planet Song

I am a wooded mountainside, peaceful in the morning sun
I am shelter to forest creatures, I nurture every one
I am old, so very old, here since time begun
But now I cry in pain and anger, anger at what's being done...

'Cause men burn me! On hot dry afternoons
Men burn me! Smell the smoke, black the ruin
Men burn me! Destroying the homes of birds and monkeys
And all in the name of heroin production for American junkies
Men burn me!
They burn me with gasoline and poison sprayed from aeroplanes
That falls on insect, plant and animal and running mountain streams

I am the skin that covers this planet, know me by my scars
I've been ripped and deeply punctured, so you can drive your cars
And you cover me, until I choke, on the waste that you discard:
But take warning that the day is near, the day you'll go too far!

Then I'll burn you! When my mountains will explode!
I'll burn you! And you'll reap the seed you sowed!
I'll drown you, put your cities under sea -
And leave once again, Those left alive, To figure out
How to live at peace with me.

I am the spirit of the Earth, I know I will survive,
As long as I circle the sun,
But it brings me no great joy
For if my body's wounded, well time can heal,
But who will heal my heart?
Of longing for a different ending,

I can't face another start ...

And I could weep if I had eyes to cry,
'Cause I don't know, I don't know the reason why
It has to be that I dance this dance alone
When all I want is to share my beauty,
My land and water, with people who will make it their home,
And not burn me!

A Testimonial from our Film-making Friends

Our young Irish film-making friends, Declan and John, have now returned to Ireland to edit the material they videoed in Caquetá. Before leaving, they sent me this piece of writing 'for the next Green Letter'.

“To say that 'Atlantis' in Caquetá is a farm on the top of a mountain, by a jungle, is an understatement and undervalues what is in fact a wonder of human good intention, sheer hard physical work and ongoing tenacity. Speaking from the point of view of first-time documentary artists, we tried to maintain, as would be expected, a position of objectivity and impartiality. Yet, faced with brick wall technical breakdowns and seeming total and omnipresent catastrophes, our impartiality waned.

“Our project began to envelop a crew that included all five 'Atlanteans', as well as the miscellaneous local green consciences that we came in contact with. Blood, sweat and tears, Guerrilla intransigence and snakes, scorpions and spiders, camera failure and generator blow-outs and some twenty-three hour mud-soaked stomps up and down the mountain has had a bonding effect upon all involved from the Bogotoan production crew right down to the school children in nearby (a 2 hour journey) Chorreras who can't point to Colombia on a map of South America.

“To place the 'Atlantis' project in its present context: the Colombian army have made an incursion into this guerrilla-controlled province reaching Balsillas (by bus, 45 minutes) by last reports. The feeling locally and in Bogota is that this is a direct repercussion (some speak of retribution) of a nation-wide guerrilla assault during which in excess of one hundred police/army were killed and many more injured, one incident taking place in the suburbs of Bogota. With relevance to 'Atlantis', the issue at the source of this regional and national unrest is the continuation of government fumigation of farm land mostly in the lowlands of the south eastern provinces. This is where 'coca' (of which cocaine is a derivative) is cultivated as the major crop. Though dealing with a different, and more lethal, narco-crop (amapola), the embryo of a solution is being nurtured by Jenny through her influence upon and co-operation with locals (not forgetting the all-important endorsement of the guerrilla) such as Roberto, Cliomedes and Camilo who spoke in interview of the difficulty of trying to subsist by the use of conventional and legal crops. Using the 'Atlantis' farm as a model of what can be produced on this poor clay soil, the frequent visitors take inspiration and also receive education on how to produce for their own table, as well as getting an insight into the potential for commercial vegetable cultivation.

“Before we came to Colombia, we were unaware that the communist guerrilla controlled the most sparsely populated regions of the country. We were unaware of the vast scale of Colombia's primary, virgin forest and depressed by the short-sighted attitude towards its elimination (“but the forest goes on forever”).

Foremostly, we were unaware of a European commune tucked away under the petticoat of the jungle in Caquetá trying to conserve and spread a little enlightenment. As a businessman in Bogota said to us recently: "I am really surprised that there are gringos in Caquetá and that they are still alive." In this haven of altruism, despite the latest setback to our schedule, the filming continues."

Slán (Irish for 'Greetings') John Oliver Coffey & Declan Lynch

Recently in a Green Letter, we reported that permits for taking wood out of this region were being 'recycled'. On 1st December, Louise (15) was in Guayabal, sitting on the bus ready to come home. She reports that the Guerrilla called everyone off the bus, and everyone from all over Guayabal, assembled them in the 'town-square' - the football pitch - and, in her own words, "The guerrilla man began speaking to the people about a lot of things. One of the things was about the wood that is being taken out of this region. He said that people were playing dirty games in order to get more wood than they are allowed out of the region and that if they went on, the guerrilla would have to ban all the wood from going out."

And the next items of local news I will entitle, **"How Anne made friends with an Enemy and got to know the new local guerrilla commander"**:

Ever since the Green movement began in this area in the autumn of 1994, we had heard stories of a man called Victor who spread obnoxious rumours about us and anyone else who tried to do any kind of social or ecological work. I had gone out of my way to make contact with him over a year ago, and found him dismissive in quite a childish way (example: 'the seeds don't sprout', referring to the hundreds of packets of seeds I'd distributed: maybe one or two didn't sprout!). His opposition got heavier - one might say more desperate - at the time of the video-filming when he tried some fairly convoluted tacks in front of the regional guerrilla commander (we shouldn't mention poppy-growing, wood-cutting or do the film at all, it seemed). The 'military base' theory of our raison d'être here, mentioned in the last Green Letter, also emanated from him.

Anne ran in to Victor at the house of a friend, Edgar, in Guayabal a few days ago. She was running through the programme of the theatre we will be performing. Victor was unable to resist his curiosity and sat with them. Edgar, well aware of the 'war' Victor had been waging against us, started praising our farm. Victor asked - could he have two pairs of our guinea-pigs for breeding?... then started boasting about a project he'd started to grow native tree species ... but then spoilt his boast by asking Anne - could we get the seeds for him? In Anne's words, "I smiled inwardly at the neediness of this self-styled enemy of ours and said, Yes of course, we'd try.

Anne's report continues: "Then Edgar and Victor began a discussion on how to dispose of the rubbish in Guayabal. Victor said they shouldn't just throw it away but sort and select and sell whatever useful materials were in it. I agreed enthusiastically with him and, turning to Edgar, said that Victor's idea was 'very wise', at which Victor swelled visibly with pride. When I left, I forced Victor to shake hands with me and said, 'Well, what a surprise, so we're all on the same side after all.' 'Yes,' he said, 'at last you're beginning to understand me,' which was a bit of a cheek considering the dangerous rumours he's been spreading! I answered 'And perhaps you're beginning to understand who we are,' grinning at him. He was struck dumb for a moment, then burst out laughing. I went off giggling to myself."

Tarot for the Guerrilla Commander

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“Later in Rovira, I ran into Liliana, the new local guerrilla commander, a very elegant young lady with waist-length black hair, long nails and perfect eye-makeup. Even her welly-boots looked elegant. I began to talk about the green projects we are trying to foment in the area, but she kind of stared through me, waited for me to pause, and then butted in saying, 'I hear you read Tarot cards - will you read mine?' 'Of course', I said astonished. When we had finished, she offered to pay me. 'No,' I said, 'the rich people in Bogota pay me so I can work here for free.' She laughed appreciatively.”

The follow-up news on the imprisonment of the murderer of my friend Luis Arenas (see Green Letter 14) is that all Luis's family, including his previously very frightened wife, followed my example, declaring all they knew to the public prosecutor. Mary Kelly has gone to Florencia to renew contact with Luis' family and to get more details.

One day when Mary was returning up our mountain she saw, coming down towards her, a group of people carrying bunches of Chinese cabbages tied together with string and slung over their shoulders. “I assumed they'd just come from our farm,” says Mary, “and asked the how they liked the place. They looked puzzled and said they'd never been there. 'But where did you get those big Chinese cabbages?' I asked. I could see that they had been grown with care and good compost. 'Up at Mrs So-and-So's farm,' they answered, adding that we had given this lady seeds and that she provided her family and friends with delicious vegetables. I was delighted and very moved.”

News from our Tolima Farm

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In the Department of Tolima we have another huge farm where we lived for six years before coming to Caquetá and which is still being run by members of our commune. When we were there, we purchased hundreds of hectares of scrub-land and secondary forest - and tiny pockets of grand old trees - until an 'island' was formed in an area otherwise totally devoted to agriculture and devoid of forest. There were times when the neighbours complained that the 'bears' would come back if we didn't clear our land. We hoped fervently that they would and fought battles against people hunting on our land.

A few days ago, I asked for, and received, a 'Reference' from a local people's leader in the area I had been living in. His name is Juvencio, a great friend of mine. I was horrified to hear he is on a paramilitary death list, and proud and delighted to read one of the paragraphs in his letter praising our previous ecological work. He says that, through us caring for the woodland and thus also the waterways on our land, we had (without knowing it) facilitated the construction of an aqueduct serving 100 families in his village further down the mountain. I was particularly surprised to read this and the other glowing terms in which he praised our work as he is a hunter himself, and often joked about going up to the 'jungle' – our farm - when he visited us. He had shown no interest in any green issues at the time. Ned, who runs the Tolima settlement, recently asked if it would be legitimate to let him have some of our seeds as neighbours are always asking him; and Magdalena, our Colombian member recently returned from two years in Ireland with Becky, reports that there is a thriving Green group in Icononzo, the nearest country

town, which she attends and speaks at. I hope all our helpers agree that the whole planet is a 'legitimate' area to assist whenever we possibly can!

Howler Monkeys Guard Forest

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I will end once again with a mention of the howler monkeys - Davey of Belfast even sent Christmas greetings to them! Well, my grandson Tristan reports that they are definitely doing their bit to guard the forest: he and a young friend from Bogota were swinging on the (terrifyingly high) creepers in the forest above our farm when - in Tristan's words - "Suddenly I heard a noise that sounded like a big bird landing. I looked up and saw eight big auburn monkeys jumping down towards us. They looked very angry and came near us. We stayed there looking at them, so very slowly they moved away from us." Obviously a territorial dispute ending in uneasy truce.

A big thank you now to Unwins Seed Co. Of Chester, to Abundant Life Seeds of America and to the person who sent me Marshall's 'Fen Bred' seeds; also to Cynthia Thompson for your exquisite English-teaching aids, and to the many many people who keep this Campaign alive with your loving and helpful letters and your practical and monetary gifts. A very green and fertile New Year to you all!

Love

Jenny James

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The Caqueta Rainforest Campaign

AA 895 Neiva, Huila Colombia S America, **26th February 1997**

Green Letter No.16

Dear Friends Across The Sea,

I am having serious doubts about my good friend Anne's astrological predictions. She said January 18th was an 'absolutely brilliant day' for our 'Green Theatre' performed for the local community of Guayabal. Well, she was right about the theatre: it was fairly brilliant; ought to have been, the weeks of intensive work that went into it and considering the combined talents of 6 youngsters and us oldies. But read Anne's own account of what happened and judge for yourself whether you'd ever fancy putting on an environmental theatre for a Colombian peasant audience on a Saturday night. OK, so she's not responsible for the mixture of the sublime, the tragic and the ridiculous that is Colombia; however, I feel reconfirmed in my belief that the safest bet in my chosen Third World home is to remain a pessimist at all times.

Over to Anne:

"The 'Comite de la Casa Cultural' of Guayabal asked us to put on a theatre show to help them raise money to pay for the wooden building which is to house the 'green' library we have donated them and which will display environmental posters, host educational events and generally elevate the abysmal level of cultural interest in the area.

"We accepted the challenge gladly, somehow squeezing in rehearsals, costume-making and the creation of several new acts written by Jenny into our already over-full daily living routine, not to mention hand-painting a stash of posters for the area advertising the 'Teatro Verde de Atlantis' - Green Theatre of Atlantis.

"We set off for Guayabal four days before the event as we guessed there would be a few difficulties to iron out, like where to sleep, what to eat, and how to handle lights and sound on stage which we're not used to. We sent a series of very detailed lists and questions to the 'Comite' including 'did we need to bring our own spoons?' and 'was there a toilet?'

"Jenny and I set off with the two smallest girls to pave the way. The first bump was that when we got down to the road after our three-hour tramp, we were told there were no buses due to large landslides from the barren hills near Neiva. We also noted that no poster advertising the theatre had been put up in Rovira by the 'Comite'. Odd. Not to be put off by a few landslides and a mountain of luggage including hula-hoops, we started trudging philosophically down the road on the four-hour trek to Guayabal.

"An engine. A bus! The only one that managed to get through in two days, by doing a mind-boggling detour from Neiva and charging peasants \$25 US instead of \$3.5 for the favour. We clambered on, a little dazed at our luck, and in Guayabal confidently presented ourselves at the wooden shack of the female President of the Comite who looked at us blankly. "Are you still going to do the theatre?? she asked. 'Of course' we answered, puzzled. "Didn't you get our letter?" she continued. "No?" we answered.

"A letter had been sent cancelling the theatre because the Committee 'couldn't afford to pay for the mules' for our luggage. Jenny was relieved it was only a financial worry and not some dreadful political hassle and said of course we'd pay all our own expenses. We certainly weren't going to waste two weeks' hard work, nerves and neglected garden to haggle over the price of some mules.

"So we moved into the communal hall which became our camping place. It was full of massive tubes for road drainage and piles of bags of cement, many ripped open and spilling their contents onto the floor and into the air. The stage was occupied by the Virgin Mary, a crucified Jesus and many plastic angels. The place doubled-up as the local Catholic Church. The priest's housekeeper eyed us disapprovingly and said we'd have to wait for the 'Padre' to return to get permission to remove the statues; he was 'away'. Jenny, who as you will all know comes from a colonialist nation (I am Irish), commanded imperiously: 'Anne, please remove Jesus.' And so of course I did, trying to hide my grin, and relocated him in the Priest's house next door.

"Four days of intensive activity followed during which we had to build 'wings' on the stage, make and hang

curtains, and sweep up cement. We had been told there were lights for the theatre. The town generator comes on at 7pm. A woman proudly switched the lights on. At this point the greenest item in our campaign was Jenny's face: two hideous strips of lighting lit up the audience space at the back of the hall. The stage remained in darkness. Fin, our one-man orchestra, who really needed to spend the time running through all the acts with the children, had to spend the next two days rewiring the 'Sala Comunal', plugging in eight light bulbs so that the audience would be able to see us instead of us seeing them.

Guerrilla Ban the word ' GREEN'

"Meanwhile Jenny organised and organised and organised in Army General style, letting slip once that we would do the next practice 'in uniform' - she meant 'in costume'. But well-organised as we were, we were but a small force against the chaos that is Colombian society. Just as we were about to get a breather from building the theatre and were about to get down to rehearsing, Jenny received a visit from the local guerrilla commander, who was new. A tiny man, he came in politely to see 'the programme' and Jenny settled down to explaining the acts to him. But he had other business. He had come to inform us that we could not call our theatre 'Green' because this was a Red area and since the local Green Party won the elections in the area two years ago (see the early Green Letters) and, according to the guerrilla 'split the region', they had decided the word GREEN must not be used in El Pato (the name of our area). Therefore, none of our beautiful posters had been put up, and no-one in the region knew of the theatre.

"I had a silent fit of mental outrage listening to him, but Jenny handled him with consummate ease and diplomacy saying, 'Yes, of course, no problem, we will change the posters'. She then had the theatre curtains drawn to reveal our lovely hand-sewn banner saying "Teatro Verde?" and 'agreeing' with the commander that of course the word 'Verde' must be blocked out. The young commander by now was hastening to make clear that the guerrilla very much agreed with 'cultura' and did not want to stop the theatre, only that the word 'green' would **let in the paramilitaries** and that would be the end of us all. Jenny didn't stop to argue, but called down her 15-year-old daughter Louise who came from backstage looking like a stunning young film star all made-up and dressed-up.

"It was pointed out that one of Louise's acts was to read her 'Poesias Verdes' - "Green Poems" and could we use that title? 'No' came the answer. 'Fine' said Jenny, 'and what about this?' She then had Louise recite her poem in Spanish called 'Verde' (the English version appears in an earlier Letter). The poor young commandante at this point was hypnotised by Louise who is exceptionally beautiful and has waist-length golden hair and already stands head and shoulders above him. He was transfixed and kept staring at her after she had finished. 'Is that alright?' asked Jenny. 'Yes, yes, of course,' said the commandante, obviously forgetting his Mission to Ban the Word Green. We politely kept straight faces.

"We later made a very obvious 'correction' to our banner, calling ourselves the 'teatro ecologico'; the posters were censored by scrubbing out the word 'green' and, just 24 hours before the theatre began, were finally stuck up in the various mountain hamlets.

"Meanwhile, we had one piece of luck: Ned, who runs the farm in Tolima, turned up with a sun-roasted Alice, Jenny's 13 year-old daughter. They had walked two days to get here as there were no buses. Ned then took on the vital job of feeding us all, plus quickly learning a part in one of the major mime-plays, which he managed to perform well without a single proper rehearsal.

"We wondered what the next piece of lunacy would be to come our way. We had only to wait to opening night. The hall filled and we jumped over our stage fright and began without a single full rehearsal. Everyone performed immaculately. No cues were missed, no lines fluffed; a precision job. Brilliant visually, excellent in terms of 'Message'. Only one problem. No-one heard a word nor took any notice of it. The sound system was fine. It's just that we had a serious audience problem. Babies howled, kids screamed, people yelled and talked throughout, hooligans heckled: so different from the well-mannered behaviour we'd had from our local Rovira audience 18 months previously.

"Anger is an excellent cure for nerves. We completed the whole theatre with precision and finesse - Jenny even had the audience listening for about two minutes when she told them off through the microphone for their behaviour. Afterwards all the Committee members said how wonderful it had been, that they'd made 130,000 pesos (about \$130) and when would we come back to do it again?

We got brooms and started sweeping up the ankle deep pig-sty of wrappers, bottles and broken glass. 'And how was it for you?' they asked us. 'It was the most disgusting experience of our lives,' said Jenny. Sometimes she is simply not diplomatic. Must have been the stars.

Here is one of Louise's Green Poems, inspired in the first lines by Red Indian chants we have heard:

Mother Nature

I feel you Mother Nature
I feel you under my feet
I hear you Mother Nature,
I hear your heart beat;
I see you Mother Nature,
I see you in great pain
Men are destroying you, Mother Nature,
They're completely insane.

You gave them your body,
You gave them your heart
And their way of paying you
Is to tear you apart.
Yet there's hope for you
In some small places;
There's love for you
In some people's faces.

The destroyers of this world
Will kill themselves one day
And then all the badness
Will vanish away.
There will be just a few left alive
And they'll be called

Low Intensity Warfare

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You will have read that the civil war in Colombia is stepping up. The Army stop all buses at Balsillas, the 'border town' between guerrilla country where we live, which is also the Caqueta provincial boundary. The young soldiers are not unfriendly - one gave Louise his hat! The guerrilla have temporarily vanished from the area, they do not seek confrontation. A couple of days ago, four helicopters dived and circled for an hour over the valley below us, presumably to 'reclaim' the area without any risk to themselves. Martyn, who is 15, was half-way up the mountain leading a laden mule. A helicopter swooped right down to him, he could see the men sitting with their legs dangling viewing him through binoculars. Very brave of them. The mule didn't flinch. It was obviously used to this kind of thing.

Natural Slaughter..

One morning, I walked out to our large hen and guinea-pig enclosure to let the chickens out of their sleeping-house. A strange stillness met me in the run. No guinea-pigs. I called everyone. I couldn't bear to look. All gone or dead, except for four terrified creatures who'd squeezed themselves into holes. Some enormous creature must have come in the night and ate the lot as there were hardly any bodies. The locals say it must have been a 'tigrillo', a large wild-cat they say can kill a person or a donkey. Our guinea-pigs, apart from being loveable friends, are vital to our compost making process. Between 50 and 100 disappeared that night.

We later collected a few from neighbours - we'd previously supplied the whole region for miles around with guinea-pigs - and started again with a tribe of 9 in a safe hutch with chicken wire lining it. A few mornings later, I suddenly had an urge to look. All dead, this time their bodies lying there. I ran in to the house in horror; I'm not as brave as the children, who studied them to find just two holes in each neck. Some kind of weasel creature had made a hole in the roof, and then in the guinea pigs.

We have started again with just two young ones. In a very safe cage in the kitchen. The miracle is that the forest's wild creatures left us alone for two whole years.

The Unmentioned Topic..

I have never noticed the issue of contraception mentioned in green literature, and yet it seems obvious that radical efforts to reduce the world's population have to be made, unless environmental concern is to be no more than a fancy pastime. Therefore we have begun to acquire large quantities of contraceptives from the offices of the European Union in Bogota which we have handed over to our local doctor friend, Mario - the only doctor in the whole region - for distribution free to local people. He was hugely grateful.

He is also at present giving our own resident nurse, Mary Kelly, weekly lessons in acupuncture and always treats us without charge because of his agreement with the work we do. I cannot get over the miracle that he exists at all in this remote region - a fully-trained acupuncturist and homeopath, as well as conventional doctor.

Small miracles do happen all the time. Recently, we had so many people staying here that even our well-stocked gardens couldn't withstand the pressure. The people working in the kitchen surrounded by our multi-coloured fruits and vegetables laughed at me as I mumbled about 'famine', but I knew the story at the other end of the production line, and was worried. Suddenly a bounteous gift arrived: a young neighbouring woman sent a huge arm-load of healthy-looking salad plants with the message 'I grew these from your seed, but I don't know what they're for, you might as well have them back'. Rocket, purslane, chicory, and many other 'exotic' plants. We planted their roots quickly and used their well-grown tops. Not quite part of my plan to help Colombian peasants become self-sufficient and stop burning trees, but very handy at the time!

Talking of 'exotic' plants, here is Mary's wish-list for seeds which she has read about and wants to try out if anyone can oblige:-

Arnica, ashwaganda, astragalus, lemon basil, bee balm, blessed thistle, burdock, catnip, celandine, roman camomile, chaste tree, chia, gypsy wort, feverfew, lion's ear, lycium, ginko, gotu kola, lobelia, mugwort, mullein, wild oregano, pennyroyal, poker-root, pyrethrum dalmatian, clary sage, salad burnet, shepherds purse, shoo-fly plant, skullcap, speedwell, St John's wort, sweet cicely, valerian, sweet flag, evening primrose. (Well, I've heard of primrose anyway!)

A while back, we had a friendly and interesting visit from the President of the local Action Committee, an elderly man called Teodoro. He talked enthusiastically about our green campaign and environmental needs in general and ended by saying, 'If only all this had been happening ten years ago.' He knew these mountains before they were stripped.

In Chorreras, the community we work most closely with, our friends Roberto and Cliomedes are

still up against a lot of suspicion about us. He pointed out that our community mainly consists of women and children, but the hostile reply came back, "The gringos (Americans) train women to be spies too, you know. Only time and good work will sway these attitudes.

Magdalena, our Colombian friend who spent two years helping at our CRAC house in Ireland, now helps to run our Tolima settlement. Over there she has become deeply involved with green groups in Icononzo, the nearest country town. The secondary school there has a students' ecological group - it is a much more developed area than Caquetá - and she was invited to a meeting where she talked about our campaign here and of her experiences in Ireland.

She reports: "The students asked me lots of questions about how people lived in Europe, what is the work like and how children are educated. I told them we must never think technology can give us everything we want for a happy life, that that is a false route. They asked me to join their group permanently. Last week, we had another meeting, and I suggested the creation of an Ecological School for children. My idea was accepted and now we are working on where it can be and how to finance it. A lot of people in the Green Group of Icononzo also want to start a communal vegetable garden and have asked me for seeds, which at the moment I'm unable to give them."

So our name of 'Caqueta' campaign needs stretching. But as long as it's Green, I don't mind where it is, do you?

Cynthia Dickinson of PO Box 10, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF4 1YX, is launching a 'CRAC Supporters Newsletter' so if any readers would like to send reports, suggestions, letters, comments, poems, please write to her.

I have long wished that I could somehow introduce to each other all the marvellous people who write to me, mainly - but certainly not only - from England. So any of you who would like to get to know each other to extend your network of friends with common interests, please contact Cynthia. I know she and my daughter Becky in Ireland are planning another CRAC Festival this year, possibly in England. I would also like everyone to know that I always answer all letters, as soon as they get to me up the mountain, so that if anyone has not received a reply, it means their letter was lost in the post - please try again!

Our work with schools is intensifying. Roberto from Chorreras is at our farm doing some work for us and he touched my heart yesterday evening by asking if we could help with exercise books and pencils, as not all the families in Chorreras can afford these items. We haven't a 'peso' ourselves, but I scoured the cabins and found a few copy-books and the children are looking out for pencils. So any of you who would like to make collections of practical items for our campaign, please add these humble things to your list!

Everyone we work with locally is always religious about mentioning where goods come from and

why. And in view of our new 'profession' as green theatre artists - we're not going to let a mere audience riot put us off - we'd like all you ladies to keep the ends of your lipstick and other discarded make-up items as this is not a commodity readily available on trees, but rather essential for the more flamboyant aspect of the green message!

On a more serious level, we are always on the look-out for Atlases, maps, and inflatable globes for the school; also Spanish-teaching books as many of our helpers turn up here without a word of the language. Anne discovered a simple and excellent way of collecting materials in an office in Bogota: it is the office of a 'New Age' glossy magazine. Once in a while, they put up a big cardboard box, with a CRAC notice above it, explaining who we are and what we're trying to do and asking for practical gifts (a list is given). Amongst other useful donations, we received several roadside shovels! - very important if you saw the state of these roads.

On the level of direct forest-saving, our next big aim is some forested land several hours away in Chorreras. Roberto has told us it contains the sources of the headwaters of his village and that the owner, who would otherwise cut and burn to grow opium-poppy, is willing to sell for between 1½ and 2 million pesos (\$1 US = roughly 1,000 pesos). Anne is working like mad in Bogota for us, but at the moment just to pay for extra food and the visas of people who want to stay here permanently, so it may be some time before we can help the Chorreras people with this land. Anyone like running jumble-sales?!

Dark is falling, I must end. I want to thank Irma Knittel of the Zegg community in Berlin for her recent visit, useful gifts and diligent gardening work. Also Graham Bowden of Doncaster who is still with us, busily building a beautiful structure to live in outside our hideous main shack; Eddie Duignan of Dublin who has decided to make this his home for now, and without whose strength in the garden I could never feed everyone; and, as always, our dozens of correspondents who keep my spirits up when Life has kicked me down, including Steph whose loving December card I don't think I acknowledged. Thank you all for caring and sending your energy.

With love,

Jenny James

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Caquetá Rainforest Campaign

GREEN LETTER FROM COLOMBIA, 17 April 3rd 1997

Hello Everyone,

At Easter 1961 I was sitting with several hundred other concerned people on the cold tarmac outside Wethersfield American Air Base in England, trying to sing as helicopters intimidated us just a few feet above our heads with a noise and wind so strong we were pressed nearly flat. Early in 1969 I sat, frightened, angry and bitter with 25 other people on the hot tarmac at the American airbase in Udorn, Northern Thailand, watching helplessly as huge bombers took off in pairs every few minutes to bomb peasants in Vietnam.

On March 2nd 1997, the day I sent off the last Green Letter, our breakfast was interrupted by helicopters overhead, financed by the American government and 'protecting' small acrobatic planes which dived and twisted at tremendous speeds through our valley, over and over again for about 40 minutes. Forty minutes of impotent fury, during which it would have taken a saint not to pray for a mishap. Every time the small planes dived, out came a long rectangular spray of white poison, glyphosate. No field in this valley is rectangular and, however skilled the acrobatics of the pilots, that dangerous herbicide did not fall only on the opium-poppy growing amongst other crops here.

The pilot of at least one of the spray planes was American - a fact denied in official circles. The proof is ridiculously simple and comes from 15-year-old Martyn, Mary's son. Here is his own account:

"I was walking towards our neighbour's house on an errand. Just as I got there I heard helicopters. Our neighbour was standing outside his house with another man and his wife, looking at an aeroplane fumigating on the other side of the valley. They had a small radio and could tune in to what the helicopter pilots were saying to one another. I heard one helicopter pilot say to another (in Spanish) 'Look, there goes that s.o.b. gringo (American), happy as can be. He really likes fumigating.' At another time they said 'Look, that f-ing gringo is not doing what we told him.' Then they said, 'Repeat that fumigation so we can take another photo.'

"Then the plane disappeared for about two minutes and suddenly reappeared on our side of the mountain, right by our neighbour's house, and fumigated the next farm where the owner has several hectares of poppy. The plane fumigated it all twice. We were watching it. Suddenly it dived towards Churco's house (our nearest neighbour) and fumigated a patch of lulos he has (a delicious fruit that grows on a prickly bush). In between the lulos he had a bit of poppy growing. Then we heard on the radio, 'Look, there are three so-and-so's watching us. Perhaps they want more. Fumigate again!' So they did fumigate again, and the three so-and-so's were us.

"Then I had to go to the farm where they had just fumigated to collect a sack of our shopping and I asked the neighbour what he was going to do now? And he said it was very nice of them to fumigate as the poppy had got covered in weeds and now the poison will kill all the weeds and he will sow again."

So much for America's grand scheme to eradicate drug crops and so much for the Colombian government's attempt to kow-tow to America.

By afternoon the valley was full of smoke. Roberto of Chorreras was working here at the time and he told me that everyone would be burning the weed residue ready for replanting in a couple of days. Meanwhile the trees? The other plants? The earth and the insects and the waters and the children? And the fear we felt, so near to our poppy-growing neighbours, as the planes swooped over us - would they mistake our lovely vegetable gardens for some illicit crop? They didn't this time.

The money spent in that morning's aggression could have solved the economic problems of this whole valley. And that was only the beginning. We have lost count now of how many times the planes and helicopters have returned just to this one tiny part of Colombia in this last month. And here the poppy-growing is on a very small scale - what must be happening in the rest of Colombia? And all because the United States of America would rather blame Third World peasants than look at the quality of life that causes its young to turn to drugs.

Roberto watched with us, fascinated. He had never seen such intensive fumigation before. He says in Chorreras there are only two farms with poppy. He was completely in touch with the long term effects of fumigation - how the poisons would go into the water table. Roberto is a quiet, solid, pensive man. At breakfast, after watching the air display, he said almost to himself: "Only war can sort this country out. Some of us will have to die, but ... " I had commented to him as we watched the planes: "There will be a few more guerrillas created today" - that is, that such an aggression would turn more people into revolutionaries. Roberto quietly replied, "Not a few, a lot."

A few days ago our horse wandered off and Martyn went to look for her. He found her next door in a blackened, barren lulo patch. Even as I have been writing this another helicopter passed overhead. The Americans must be very, very determined not to look at what their 'development' has meant in terms of a worth-while, human-sized life-style, preferring to pretend the problem lies over here in poppy-growing Colombia.

A recent poem from Louise:

My sister and I ride up the lane
We run, canter, then gallop through the rain
The wind is blowing the horse's mane
As we ride through fields of sugar-cane.
I wonder how anyone prefers a train,
A car, a bus or an aeroplane?
I hate those things -

They drive me insane!

On the day of that first fumigation we received a visit from a grey-haired gentleman who had not been here before but whom I knew immediately: his name is Ediberto, he is about 50 years old and a respected member of the local Rovira community, acting as treasurer on their community action group. We first met him when we put on our 'Green Theatre' in Rovira nearly two years ago; he attended all our local environmental meetings and is hugely concerned about 'green' matters.

He came because the day before he'd been at a local meeting where the matter of Ricardo's forest came up - the forest we purchased just before Ricardo died. It seems that since his death a bevy of 'relatives' have appeared from all over the place, several wives and many offspring of Ricardo's deceased father, all claiming that Ricardo had no right to sell to us. I had already received visits from two of these relatives hoping that the 'stupid gringos' would hand over money to them; I had extremely politely sympathised with them and even more politely told them where to get off. (My Irish friends listened to me in disgust and awarded me a job in the British diplomatic service.)

Now Ediberto came to tell us that the priest of Guayabal had been encouraging Ricardo's relatives to demand back the land we have paid for, but that he, Ediberto, had put his foot down firmly and said, "No way." The President of the Junta (action committee) had previously shown us similar support. I suggested to Ediberto that we form a Green Foundation and hand over all the forests we have saved to the community. He said "definitely not!" as the members of the Junta would change and it might fall into the hands of the 'corruptos' who would cut the forest, and that the forest was much safer with us!

Ediberto is the only man on the Rovira Junta who does not sow amapola (heroin poppy). He uses himself as an example to the people saying "Look, I survive. I grow coffee, yucca, bananas." He says he is always speaking locally against poppy-growing, pointing out the social degradation it brings through reliance on drug traffickers, the lack of a future for the region if it is the only crop, and its effect on teenagers abroad.

Recently we have been shocked to learn that an Evangelist neighbour, Don Carlos, who once preached so convincingly to me that he would never grow drug crops, has several hectares and, worse still, our friend Mario the doctor, whose job is to cure people and for whom we had tremendous respect, also has a crop. For most people money speaks louder than morals. And these last two mentioned are definitely not poor people, having other resources.

Ediberto is much poorer. I know: I spent a terrible night at his little shack on the road, shivering under one thin blanket and with nowhere to sit except in the open, dark, smoky, mud-floored kitchen where he listens to excellent little programmes on the radio about the medicinal value of various local plants - Colombia is always a country of surprises. When he was visiting our farm, I gave him some green literature, but first asked him if he could read - this is a sensible question here and is not taken as an insult. He answered "Not very well" and immediately wanted me to listen to him read to show me what he could do. He told me of his trek up the muddy, de-forested pathways to our farm, how there were no animals any more - until he stepped onto our land and saw a squirrel. How do souls like Ediberto get born, and how come so many of them are collected together in this abandoned area?

I spent a week away from the farm visiting our contacts in Chorreras and elsewhere, renewing our bonds of solidarity. Ever since Enrique, the 'green' guerrilla commander, left the region last year, general attitudes on the guerrilla front have been most unpromising. Several young commanders came and went and none were interested in green projects. Ediberto reported that Victor 'the one who always speaks against you' (he's a local communist leader) had been doing his work well, casting suspicions on our motives. When running into this kind of criticism, local friends told us they always referred to Commander Enrique's tremendous support for our work - even the fact that he actually instigated the Chorreras green group. The reply from our detractors is evidently to ask for 'written proof' - an absurdity in these illiterate regions where no FARC commander would ever commit himself to paper. Ediberto mumbled that if things continue this way, we must go to the top command of the FARC who are definitely environmentally-minded.

Then, during my week's visiting, I heard two bits of information, one a great relief: that a more senior commander who had operated in the region before, was back; that he was fully in favour of environmental projects and that now presentation of a project that we had worked on, to apply for funds from the Dutch government, can sail ahead.

The other news was that Enrique is dead. Roberto and Cliomedes of the Chorreras Green Group flatly refused to believe it; so did Camilo the school teacher. I agonised all night, thinking about Enrique. And then I listened to Camilo, and he is very convincing; he says it is a ploy put out by the FARC to protect Enrique's life as there is such a huge ransom on his head, most tempting to impoverished peasants; so by saying he has been killed the hope is that no-one will look for him any more. Except those of us who love him and want him alive.

While in Chorreras I spent two days painting a huge sign for them which is now displayed proudly outside Roberto's house; it is a punning slogan, in Spanish, which translates as -

"We have already destroyed half of our environment. Let us preserve the other half"

And on the newly whitewashed bridge over the river I have painted the slogan they suggested:

"Don't be dirty with our water. Don't throw your rubbish in the river."

I walked into the little school, delighted to renew contact with Camilo again. All the children were sitting around in a circle and, one by one, midst giggles and blushes, were getting up, singing a little song and - if the other children agreed it was good enough - were rewarded with one of the pencils Anne had managed to obtain in Bogotá. I felt like crying and immediately lost my resolve 'never to do theatre' again (a vow made because of the bad behaviour of the Guayabal audience). I could just feel how good it would be to present our green theatre in this little hamlet, and there was quite a good chance that here the people would listen so with the enthusiastic assent of Camilo, Roberto and Cliomedes' wife, Gloria, who had seen a shortened version of the theatre when she visited our farm, we planned a theatre for April 26th. Our children at home were less than delighted, but never mind, I am an acclaimed genius for drumming up enthusiasm for events that make my own heart sink

I am also fairly good at choosing the 'wrong time' for my trips out, if landing myself with a lot of walking is the 'wrong time'. Do the landslides see me coming? Or does my vibration cause them? Or do they happen so often I'm bound to pick a day when there are No Buses? Whatever, in El Pato we have been cut off

from the Great Outside for some weeks now, beginning when I was in Chorreras ... evidently a very large hole indeed has appeared between us and the town of Neiva four hours away by bus, which, it was rumoured, would take a month to mend. So visits and post have stopped for a while and I had a lot of exercise on my trip out. Secretly I like these landslides, for I hope it will sink into the common Mind that self-sufficiency is a rather good idea.

Certainly Mary met with a mass of enthusiasm this week as she travelled around the area giving out packets of seeds - often collecting lovely flower cuttings for our own garden in return - and even helping to start dig someone's garden in Rovira, an event which evidently caused a whole bevy of women to come and watch in amazement. I often get Mary to do my 'dirty work' for me, as she doesn't suffer from that awful Englishwoman's disease, social embarrassment. Thus when I had the Good Idea - a fairly obvious one if you saw the rubbish everywhere - that the people of Rovira should dig a big pit and put their garbage in it, it was Mary who bravely suggested it to local women - and was met with great enthusiasm! We have promised added labour if they organise the where and when. I had agonised about this simple suggestion for longer than I dare admit - and yet it was so easily accepted in the end. I am still learning that Colombia isn't Europe and the 'who-do-you-think-you-are' response is foreign to their minds.

Outside visitors may not be able to get into the area, but local visitors are more and more frequently making the trek up to our farm, in fact there's hardly a day passes without someone coming. One morning at the washing-up place (out of doors in this climate) I said "Gosh, we really could do with an extra male helper on the farm at the moment. A few minutes later Oliverio, a worker from the neighbouring farm, came cheerfully up the pathway. "I've come to work" he said. "What?" I answered, "but it's Sunday." Colombians are not very religious, but they are very religious about their day of rest. However, some of them prefer to come and work here - for food and home-made wine, fun and friendship, not money - rather than submit to the noise of the Sunday macho scene in Rovira. In so doing they share our unusual food (it comes from the garden) our unusual way of working (with Nature instead of against her) and our unusual attitudes (work is pleasure).

Our youngsters have carved a football pitch out of the mountainside in a field next to the house - some feat at this gradient - and every afternoon it's volley-ball or football with the local lads. Not my idea of relaxation, but I love the social aspect of our farm which makes our practical ecological living accessible to everyone. Women especially come for seeds and for (quite scruffy) second-hand clothes which we give away regularly. They are hugely delighted and always bring some little gift in exchange, often of crops hard to grow at this level. And they always leave with a little bunch of onion and garlic chives to replant on their land - the plants are not known here - and a sprig of parsley, also little known. As time goes on we hope to give away more and more transplants, turning the place into a regular nursery.

Mary reports that, on her travels locally, she came across flourishing little gardens started with the seeds we had donated, where the owners were so pleased with the results that they were now buying their own seed. For those of you who are keen on sending seed, we could never have enough of cilantro (coriander). I can't abide the stuff myself, but all Latin-Americans love it and are always asking for it. Also, for our own garden, I would love to try Jerusalem artichokes, and wonder if mushroom spores are a feasible item to post? Likewise fruit-bush cuttings and rhubarb root. I have also been reading how important it is to test one's soil for acidity and keep seeing a 'pH soil test' mentioned; if anyone knows how to do this, in a simple way, we'd be grateful.

On the medical front, Mary often has to stitch people up after farm accidents and she is putting out a call for any type of bandages, disinfectant, suturing threads (silk and catgut), needles, local anaesthetic, anti-septics and (possibly natural?) anti-biotics. Being able to offer these small services to local people all helps with our 'message' as it makes us very accessible and not just some aloof foreigners, descending with lofty, irrelevant messages. I am fairly impressed with how, just like working in an organic garden, one begins to reap rewards long after the original 'compost' has been spread. This New Year has brought a distinct feeling of being firmly 'rooted' in the community, which means my political weather-eye will be out for when and how far we can push the environmental message. So far we have operated mainly by example, relatively quietly and behind the scenes. With our theatre, schools-work, seed and gardening fame and Mary's forays out weekly for her acupuncture lessons and 'stitching sessions' (Mario the doctor lets her stitch up patients so she can learn), I sense the time is arriving when it will take me less than a year to dare to suggest that local people dig a rubbish pit!

On the natural pest control front, I can report two successes and some mighty failures. Leaf-cutter ants and the damage they cause have to be seen to be believed. Run by computer, these creatures cannot see the sense of taking just a few bites from plants at random, so they strip blackberry bushes, lemon and apple trees, cabbage - travelling great distances and ignoring all the succulent greenery around them to do so. When I saw the bare ribs of some newly planted and greatly treasured rhubarb (who said the leaves were poisonous? Colombian insects love them), I got cruel. I called for my 14 year-old grandson, Tristan; he is a great tracker. First he cleverly sprinkled the determined marching creatures - each with its green banner, our rhubarb - with lime so they showed up more. Then he dug where they disappeared into the earth - and found an old hollow tree root. On a hunch he ran down to a wild part of the garden and started hacking away at a rotting tree stump. Bingo! A beautiful compost heap of a year's nicked fruit and veg leaves and Goodbye ants. I'm sorry but sometimes to be a vegetarian one has to employ carnivorous chickens.

Success No. 2: mice nicked Tristan's newly planted maize before it could sprout. Our greenhouse grows excellent hot peppers (which we give away as our delicate palates can't stand them!): we soaked the maize seed in a concoction of this hot solution overnight and this time the mice left the maize to sprout. But cucumbers: I've given up and given all our seed away. They get mildew and die overnight. And beans! Beautiful, gorgeous essential beans; we can't grow one in this bean-growing area. Everyone else sprays - we don't; so guess where the armies of bean-hungry beetles go? Spraying with chilli-pepper did not work: the beans shrivelled up and died and the beetles loved the stuff! Any bright ideas on a postcard please!

We would like to thank *Esotera* magazine in Germany for printing an excellent article about our campaign written by Leila Dregger of the Zegg community, Berlin. Although the title, "Retterin des Regenwaldes" (Saviour of the Rainforests) had me squirming - would that it were true - the contents were so positive and helpful that almost immediately a German lady wrote offering help.

Around the same time, *Notas de Luz*, a Bogotá New-Age magazine, published an article about our community, 'Atlantis', with some lovely photos of the area and the farm, under the heading "An experiment for a Different Sort of Colombia". These are very heartening events although I always cringe a little as what we do is painfully, tragically little in relation to even this small area of scarred and burnt hillsides and degraded lifestyles. On hot days, when all the neighbours burn their fields and the edges of the forest, all I

can do is grit my teeth, remember how small I am, and feel like some kind of crazy 20th century 'King Canute' trying to stem the tide of burning and felling all around.

I think I will end on a lighter note; in the middle of a drought last week, Tristan was digging near a palm when suddenly water started bubbling up from the parched ground. "Look, a fountain!" he said. Everyone crowded round. He hacked again, and water started spurting. But I was suspicious and sent Fin to check whether our irrigation system wasn't building up dangerously in some underground channel. Tristan hacked again and the bubble of magic burst as a very ordinary piece of pink hosepipe revealed its damaged self - laid underground a year ago by a visiting friend to supply my wash-place.

In spite of which, magic does happen and is happening daily as we continue with this rewarding work. The American Book Centre in Amsterdam, who were evidently contacted by an unknown well-wisher, sent us several gift-books, one of which is a gem I want to recommend to everyone. It is called '**Ecotopia**' and is written by Ernest Callenbach, published in 1975, and gives a marvellous vision of a very possible future, written in novel form. I hated 'waking up' after finishing the book, it felt so real and true; but the very fact that type of society can be visualised means we all have it in us to make it happen.

I would like to thank Crofton Junior School in Wakefield, Yorkshire, for the seeds they sent and wish everyone on the other side of the hole-in-the-road good energy for your own environmental work! With thanks to all our correspondents and helpers,

Jenny James

AA 895

Neiva, Huila

COLOMBIA

South America

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GREEN LETTER No 18 from COLOMBIA, May 19th 1997

In the '80's, as I lay stiff with fear in my cosy bed on Inishfree Island, listening to the wind howling outside and planning our expedition to South America, I used to fantasise all manner of horrors that would await us in the 'New World', ranging from Tarantulas to Hunger and Heights. All these have been faced, and until two days ago, I thought I was a relatively unruffleable traveller.

Then I received a visit from three men, one of them 68 years old, from a distant hamlet called Vista Hermosa (Beautiful View) who came to ask us for help. They said they lived on the left-hand bank of the River Pato - which makes them an illegal settlement inside the National Park of Los Picachos (The Peaks) and had no bridge, and would we go and view their situation? They were extremely nice, simple men and stayed with us overnight as they lived so far away; we performed a couple of acts of our theatre for them, and I left with them at first light the next morning with my youngest daughter Katie (11) to see their living situation as they requested. The oldest man was a bit of a prankster, full of jokes, a reciter of poems and a teller of tales. He described the method for getting across the river to their hamlet by putting a piece of rope round his rear side, and 'hanging' it to an imaginary cable. It sounded ghastly.

But it was much worse than that. Katie and I were getting more and more nervous, wondering if they were exaggerating about the way we had to get across the river, as the bus trundled its long slow way down the only road in El Pato, past Chorreras, past Los Andes, till my companions called for it to stop by a gate to a field. No houses in sight. At Los Andes, one of the men had jumped off the bus and collected two ropes with hooks attached. That didn't look too good and Katie and I got more nervous.

I hardly noticed the walk down to the river, I was so scared. When we got there, it was worse than I could have imagined. A thin wire cable stretched from a tree on each side of the river, while fifteen feet below, the turbulent water crashed over rocks. The old man (who called himself an 'Indio', though he wasn't, tied himself on to the cable in a jiffy, and then with the agility of the pet monkey we used to have, took himself at great speed across the 100 foot river by lying parallel to the wire and moving by passing one hand over the other. The hook he was hanging on had two prongs. On the other was his considerable baggage - we had donated books and clothes to his community.

I sat sulking in silent panic on a rock sending out the general vibration that if anyone tried to move me, they would have Trouble on their hands. I was not in any mood to be brave, didn't give a damn for my hardy reputation, and was quite satisfied already that the hamlet of Vista Hermosa most definitely needed a bridge. Then the second man went across; grinning. My mood got fouler as panic rose; I told Katie threateningly that I was not going across and nor was she. I think she was a little grateful for a bit of maternal authoritarianism that day; normally she is insanely brave.

The third man, Urbano by name, was a quiet, gentle soul, and very instinctual. He didn't bother to try and persuade me, but indicated a second cable nearby that I'd hardly noticed. On it hung an old fish box. Well, that's what it looked like to me. He said they used to use it to bring blocks of wood across the river in the bad old days of heavy forest-felling. Would we like to sit in it and he would 'ferry' us across - that is, provide the hand-power on the cable to transport his swinging, terrified human cargo from one side to the other. We climbed in, myself in a state of shock. Katie said it wasn't nearly as bad as she'd imagined - she'd pictured the river much wider. I didn't like to mention that the width wouldn't matter a damn if we fell.

The worst bit was when we were nearly across and our 'ferry-man' couldn't possibly muster the strength to move our box the last couple of yards, as the wire now stretched upwards. The man on the bank threw a rope (still grinning) and hauled us in.

It was afternoon, the climate was much hotter than where we live, I'd been up since 5 am, done the three hour trek down our mountain, the long bus-journey, had no breakfast - and now this. When we landed on the opposite river bank, I crumpled up. I had no bones in my legs and felt the pains of hunger. The men were polite. And delighted. They had made their point about the bridge. They were extremely kindly to me, carried my bag, walked slowly. I asked them to watch out for fruit of any kind as I was seriously hungry.

Guayabas - guavas - grow everywhere in this part of Colombia. Neither the children nor I ever eat them as they are full of little white maggots as soon as they ripen. This time I didn't care. And so I fulfilled another of my long-ago fantasies: of being so hungry I'd have to eat maggots like the Indians. Even Katie ate some. For a while, I simply had to lie down on the plastic grass (that's what I call a special animal-fodder that doesn't rot, that doesn't let any normal weeds grow, and is covering Colombia where forests used to be.) I heaved like a wounded animal: fear is a great debilitator, and the 'bridge' had seriously shocked me.

We spent the night at the first farmhouse, and all the next day, an extremely boring day - the sort I would never normally put up with. If there had been a way home, that is. Memory of The Cable kept me rooted. I drew an impression of their crossing-system in cartoon form with a dozen jokes emitting from the mouths of the people and animals in the drawing. The men were delighted and said it was very 'bonito' - pretty. I didn't think so.

Their settlement was certainly very beautiful as its name implied; also very deforested. But to the back of us were near sheer forested mountain rocks, massive waterfalls - and the peasants told me they had made a commitment never to cut any more forest; also it was an area completely devoid of drug crops. And to my amazement, they were nearly self-sufficient in food, though very carnivorous. Huge pineapples, cocoa, maize, sugar-cane, lemons, gallons of milk, 'rubber' cheese (that's what it tastes like after it's been overboiled and had far too much rennet put in it - the custom here), eggs, plantains, bananas - and many dead animals, which we wouldn't touch. Only one problem: no way of taking their produce to market except by 'cable-car'; and no way for any of their children to go to school in Los Andes.

I promised to tell 'the people in Europe' about their situation. Mission accomplished.

Don Guillermo, the 68-year-old of that group, handed me duplicated copies of many little songs and poems and stories of this region. One was typed in the shape of a tree, no author's name given. Here is my translation of it:

The Tree's Prayer

Traveller: listen!

I am the wood of your cradle,
the planks of your boat,
the top of your table,
the door of your house,
the handle of your tools,
and the walking-stick of your old age.

I am the fruit that nourishes you
the shade that protects you against the fierce sun,
the refuge of birds that bring joy to your life
and keep your field clear of insects.

I am the beauty of the countryside,
the charm of your garden,
the majesty of your mountains,
the edging of your roads.

I am the firewood that warms you in winter,
the aroma that delights you
and perfumes the air,

I am the health of your body,
the joy of your soul,
and finally, I am the wood of your coffin.

So, Traveller:
look at me, revel in my beauty,
But don't hurt me.

Recently, a young neighbour had been visiting me for what I can only call 'counselling', as his marriage was on the rocks. I did what I could, and he repaid me by breaking a Colombian taboo: no-one ever 'tells' on anyone else, for fear of reprisals. With great trepidation, he took me aside, and said, 'Jenny, you must not mention my name, but someone is cutting the forest you bought from Orlando.'

Anne went up to look. That sentence didn't take very long to write: the trip is in fact several very wet, muddy, hungry hours long. Yes, the forest was being cut. And there was only one neighbour it could possibly be. Mary told the Junta (local community action group) and within days, they made the massive trek up from the village to the forest above us - about five hours one way, collecting Anne and the offending neighbour along the way. The meeting was amicable, with Anne conceding maybe she had mistake the boundaries Orlando had shown her (with the members of the Junta exchanging winks with her), and the two 'green' members, Teodoro and Edilberto, delivering a lecture to the possible culprit about the amount of forest he had cut, whoever's it was, and about the fact he had cut right up to the edges of a stream - definitely out of order - and, worse, around the spring where a river began.

Sometimes, to be true to our guardianship of the forest, we have to be perceived as fierce women, else we might as well not purchase forest in the first place.

Green Theatre in Chorreras

-

I mentioned in the last Green Letter that we were to do a theatre performance in Chorreras. We did, on 26th April, and it was a perfectly delightful experience, with an immaculately behaved audience, tremendous appreciation, and a small collection for our bus-fare home as we hadn't a peso! We lived in

Chorreras, all 10 of us, in a little wooden shack for four days previous to the theatre, erecting curtains, organising, practising - and teaching Camilo the teacher his part in an 'Irish' play I had written from the story of Cuchulainn and Finn MacCool! He was a giant who has to be dressed as a baby to fool his rival. His school-pupils loved it! There were several 'green' plays, and I checked carefully afterwards to discover if they had been understood. They had - not only that, but I was informed of the 'message' in one play that I had definitely not put there, and I was most puzzled: Roberto said the message was we mustn't kill animals, as we are part animal. It took me a long time to ponder this, as my play was about the possible beginnings of the world - with a 'sky-woman' (me) coming down in a space-ship to cross-breed with a Neanderthal man (Ned!). I finally realised that Ned had played his part so well that he had been seen to be a 'monkey' - so of course we mustn't kill monkeys.

Camilo has asked for the text of Louise's green poems in Spanish and the plays with an environmental message - he wants to teach them to his children so that they can perform them. Also he is getting the children to learn a verse each of a long 'green' poem I wrote some time ago, which takes a message from each of several animals, and to illustrate it. What a gem that man is.

After the theatre, Fin (our one-man orchestra) and Louise formed a posse to bring me a complaint: why did we go to all this effort to bring the theatre to only one village at a time, and why couldn't we do several performances in a row? As the sweat was still wet on my brow, I was getting a huge Grumble together at this suggestion when the crowded local bus swaggered to a stop outside our open-fronted shack and Angel (a common Spanish name), a teacher-friend of mine, hopped off while the driver waited to say, 'Jenny, the community of Las Morras where I work wants to invite you to show your theatre down there (four hours from Rovira). 'Fine', I said, 'Fix me up some arrangements with three other settlements within reasonable distance, and we'll do all of them at once.'

It is now three weeks since the Chorreras theatre and we have received yet another request for theatre, but my garden is getting hairy round the edges, Fin is getting balder with all the work, Mary has left us to go and help Becky with the campaign in Ireland, and Anne is just catching her breath before taking off on her next money-making tour (we pay our bus-fares in school-books at the moment); Irish Eddie is away getting his immigration legalised, and I am still recovering from a brush I had with a Cable-car across a river... However, the theatre is very beautiful, and is a wonderful way of getting the Green message across, so no doubt we'll be getting the show on the road (or mule-track) again soon. In another Letter I will tell some of the environmental plays in more detail (that is, the ones I have fully understood!).

A Moan – What are People *For*?!

Although I feel very happy and optimistic today, I must pay homage to yesterday's mood: I arrived home from my Vista Hermosa trip practically soul-dead and asked Anne's permission to lay funeral-vibes all over her for a couple of hours. My main them was What are People For, What Are We Doing? and why didn't we just give up, live private middle-class lives, never go out, and grow lots of roses? Anne listened to me patiently and explained that several days away without eating any vegetables was bound to depress me. I thought the explanation absurd and continued to explain to her that the World had Ended, there weren't any trees left, and that people's standard of living - that is, nothing to do with their income, but their cock-fighting, drinking, drug-growing, animal-slaughtering, lollipop-licking, fashion-aping, cigarette-smoking, deafening music and fume-creating life-style was not one we should do anything to

help, and why didn't we just admit defeat and pack up and it wasn't fair writing to all those kind people in England a stream of Green Letters giving them hope when there wasn't any. Meanwhile, Fin brought me a hot-water-bottle (it's cold up here compared to where I'd been) and a vegetarian supper and Anne said she felt ready and strong enough to go out on the next journey (other communities have asked us to visit them) and I was doing a Good Job just holding the fort, growing the food and writing the letters; and that I'd feel better in the morning. Anyway, would I really feel alright just growing roses with the world falling to pieces? Well....no.

Here now is a recent report of Anne's on some of her travels:

"My Bogota trips have turned into something much more than income-earning from astrology work. The level of help and co-operation from my 'clients', all of whom know I am earning money to keep our 'green' work going, makes me flounder with embarrassed gratitude. Claudio let me do endless photocopying of Green Letters in his office; Luz Marina has kept me in her apartment for months, getting annoyed with me when I dared to buy food, and delighted when I filled her little living-room with all kinds of odd visitors like Ecuadorean street-musicians, Irish cameramen and Caqueta peasants! Myriam has fixed my teeth and all the kids' teeth for free; Leticia receives phone-calls and makes appointments for me when I'm out; Jeremy receives and sends e-mails to Europe, Meredith develops photos for us of the region we live in to show townspeople; Guy and German allow me to pile their houses high with the goods we are donated - dozens of people give me huge bags of second-hand clothes that they insist on washing and ironing first.

On my most recent trip, I called on a friend, Maria Clara, who is Director of the Bogota section of a national poverty programme, and she said, "Thank goodness you've come; I've been hoping you would for the last week - we've been given a mountain of contraband clothes confiscated by the Customs, for distribution to poor people." Her driver drove me to Luz Marina's flat - and it so happens she owns two city buses, so she contacted one of her drivers to divert the bus to take me to the lorry terminal. A lorry company hires its vehicles out to 'Carulla', the largest supermarket chain in Colombia. One of its directors, Octavio, has become a friend and he regularly lets us take our mountains of give-away gear to Neiva for free. At the Neiva bus-terminal, I was assured that in spite of the imminent transport strike, I would be able to get one of the last buses, complete with my 28 bags and boxes.

The last bus arrived, with people hanging off every part of it. I was nearly in tears as I pleaded with the bus-man, who eventually started chucking all my bags on to the roof. I climbed up too and squeezed myself into a corner and we set off out of the heat and dust of Neiva for the cool green mountains. Everyone wanted to know what the bags contained, except the fare-collector who only wanted to know how much I was going to pay him for carrying them. He wanted to charge me 30 dollars, an outrageous price, and tried to bully me by threatening to keep some of my bags as payment. I explained loudly to all the passengers that the goods were for poor people in the area and refused to negotiate until we arrived safely in Rovira.

The bus only broke down twice and we only got searched twice by soldiers, finally arriving at 10 pm (instead of 6.00 pm) in pitch blackness. All the friends I had made on the roof-top helped me unload and Gladys the local teacher came out in the rain with candles to help me store the gear in the school-house. She gave out roundly to the bus-man who deflated and asked contritely for 10 dollars instead.

Next day, I climbed the mountain to home. As I got near the house, I found myself walking through a whole new flower garden that had been rough pasture when I left only three weeks earlier. Jenny and Mary came out to meet me looking healthy and rosy and full of news. Part of the news delivered by Jenny was that we were officially suffering a 'famine' because of having several new people to feed and too much rain. Next day when I took over the cooking to give Mary a break, I couldn't find the space on our 6-ring wood stove to cook the incredible variety and quantity of foods, not to mention all the herbs, salads, tomatoes and peppers - some famine!

And then I began to catch up on the correspondence in the ever-more-quickly growing Green files in Jenny's 'office' and once again I became completely submerged in the waves of love and support and appreciation that flowed over me."

On Anne's last trip, she brought home over 1,000 school-books, many of which now by law have an environmental content. These have been delivered, together with the pencils - factory 'seconds' which she acquired, - to many of the country schools in the area. When I was sitting on the bus in Guayabal after my cable-bridge expedition, a lady I didn't know came up to me and said, 'Jenny, I am the President of the Action Committee in Los Andes. I want to thank you on behalf of my community and that of La Libertad (another hamlet) for the wonderful school-books.' Well, maybe it is worth carrying on after all.

Sometimes I worry about what we have started. It is now impossible to travel in our region without people coming up and asking for seeds. And we have run out of seeds, for the first time since we began the Campaign. So vegetable seeds are top priority on our 'wish-list.' Here are other needs, for those of you who feel able to help in a practical manner:

*Translators who are completely fluent in Spanish to translate the Green Letters into Spanish: I simply can't afford the time, and many local people of course want to know what I write about them;

*A fluent German-Spanish translator to translate an excellent article about us written by Leila Dregger of Zegg Community so I can show local people;

*Scraps of material that would do for making curtains and costumes for our theatre, also any makeup. We also need offers of collection points for bulky material goods - please send addresses to Becky at An Droichead Beo, Burtonport, Co. Donegal, Ireland;

*HELP for Becky at same address, particularly in sending out Green Letters, and other practical help at the house; and money for postage - it's becoming a heavy drain on her scant resources; also, a note if you don't want Green Letters any more would be a help. Thankyou.

*Old files, especially big 'box' files;

*Letters from school-children who would like penpals amongst the peasant children here;

*Old gardening tools, any condition;

*And lots of visitors who can: dance, juggle, teach drama and music; language teachers, puppet theatre experts, musical instrument menders and makers, and people who love digging and carrying compost!

To end, I would like to mention a project which has invented itself: we have a very large farm in the Department of Tolima. The countryside there is much 'flatter' than in Caqueta (about as 'flat' as the English Lake District!) and most of the woodland is secondary forest; there are many open areas, beautiful streams, pools, rocks and waterfalls. It is altogether a 'cosier' place to live, if anywhere in Colombia can be described as cosy. Recently, some environmentally minded Bogota people have bought small sections (that is, dozens of acres) of the farm, and we have ploughed the money back into the Campaign. As land-buying in Caqueta is very urgent - neighbours on both left and right of our forest are slaughtering trees daily very high up on steep inclines (the worst for erosion), we have decided to open up our Tolima land for sale to environmentally responsible people anywhere, whether to live on or as absentee owners for us to care for. The money earned from sales would be used immediately to save threatened forest - which is not suitable for living in - in this part of Caqueta.

Also, if anyone tunes into the need to help marginal communities on the edge of forest-land, we ourselves are definitely intending to use any privately-earned income we can spare to help the people of Vista Hermosa to build their bridge! If any donors have no objection to their contributions going to this project, please say so. We feel that every time we respond to pleas like this from local people, we give our own environmental stand greater weight. We have noticed that there is never an argument as to whether the green message is correct - everyone sees that it is; the cry is always: but how else can we live if the government doesn't help us? We hope little by little to be able to answer this question in a practical way.

Our best wishes to all of you, and most especially to those of you who write letters of love and encouragement. I want particularly to mention Christine Farmer who sent me the extraordinary gift of a psychometric reading of great value in a difficult moment; and the Ditchling Society of Friends (Quakers) for your love and tolerance of an atheist!

With love,
Jenny

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ASSASSINATION OF EDUARD RINCON, Green Councillor and friend

GREEN LETTER FROM COLOMBIA No. 19, June 12th 1997

To Environmentalists Everywhere, Greetings.

I have before me something I have longed to see ever since this Campaign began. It is a small duplicated sheet in Spanish called 'Resistencia' distributed in rural Colombia by the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and dated April 1997. It carries the title 'Ecological Bulletin' and I am going to translate the whole thing for you. It is of huge significance for this reason: the Colombian Govt. can spout fine-sounding ecological principles (to secure foreign funding), but it is largely hot air. However, whatever the colour of your politics, the fact remains that what the FARC says, goes, as far as the countryside is concerned. And when the red FARC goes Green, there is a glimmer of hope for the environments. Here is the translation:

“It is a fact that the **INDISCRIMINATE FELLING OF FORESTS** for illegal (drug) crops and for logging has never been of benefit to those who do the work, because to this day, no chainsaw-man or cultivator of narcotic plants has managed to stabilize the economic situation of his family. These practices have only served to fill the pockets of the big timber and narcotics merchants and all we are left with is an **ECOLOGICAL IMBALANCE** which is very difficult to repair.

“Because **DEFORESTATION** does not guarantee social or economic security, we propose to local communities that they **SUBSTITUTE ILLEGAL CROPS** for legal ones, and use only land which has already been deforested.

“Desiring to help conserve the natural resources of **FLORA AND FAUNA** which are the guarantee of life for the generations of today and tomorrow, the FARC informs of the following:-

1. **IT IS ONLY PERMITTED TO FELL** trees for wood when it is a question of building a house, a fence, a bridge, furniture or other necessities connected with the work of the farm. **IT IS PROHIBITED** to fell for marketing the timber.
2. **TREES WHICH ARE FELLED** must be more than 20 years old, and **MUST NOT BE LESS** than 100 metres distant from water-sources, or 50 metres from waterways and streams, nor must they be taken from **AREAS WHERE EROSION IS PREVALENT**.
3. **THE TREES FOR FELLING MUST NOT BE THE ONLY ONES IN THE AREA**, that is, the principal sources of guaranteeing humidity of the surrounding land.

4. THE ONLY TIMER THAT CAN BE COMMERCIALIZED is wood that is taken out when a farm is established or when through *force majeure*, trees fall down naturally in cultivated land.
5. FOR EVERY TREE WHICH IS CUT, a minimum of three must be planted and these must be suitable for the type of soil and climate.
6. LIKEWISE IT IS PROHIBITED to contaminate any waterways, and it is the responsibility of each farm-owner to channel dirty water from his household or toilets in such a way that it does not reach other living accommodation, schools or rivers.
7. BURNING MAY ONLY BE CARRIED OUT when fields are being cleared for crops, and only with the necessary security measures, namely: checking on all sides to make sure the fire doesn't spread and informing neighbours so they can take safety precautions. BURNING IS NOT PERMITTED FOR ANY OTHER REASON OR IN ANY OTHER MANNER.
8. FISHING IS ALLOWED ONLY FOR FAMILY CONSUMPTION and only using fish-hooks. IT IS ABSOLUTELY PROHIBITED to use any other sort of instruments, poisons, explosives or other contaminatory substances.
9. THE HUNTING OF ANY TYPE OF ANIMAL, WHETHER FUR OR FEATHER IS ABSOLUTELY BANNED, even under pretext of defending crops: other methods of scaring pest-animals away must be used.
10. WHEN THERE IS ANY INTENTION OF FELLING FOREST OR CUTTING TREES for any reason whatever, prior notice must be given so that the real necessity for this can be verified.

NOTE: THESE NORMS WILL BE RIGIDLY APPLIED FROM 1ST MAY 1997. FAILING TO COMPLY WITH OR VIOLATING SAME WILL BE PUNISHED IN PROPORTION TO THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE OFFENCE WITH FINES OF BETWEEN 100,000 AND 1,000,000 PESOS WHICH WILL BE HANDED OVER TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY ACTION GROUPS FOR WORKS OF BENEFIT TO THE WHOLE COMMUNITY.

The local Community Action Groups, in co-ordination with our movement (FARC) will be authorized to carry out, and responsible for, vigilance and seeing that these rules are complied with.

Signed: (FARC High Command)

Against such a background, our Campaign feels more meaningful than ever. It must also be pointed out that there is a tremendous movement amongst the right-wing military at the moment to 'reclaim' the 'lost' areas of Colombia – lost, that is, to the left-wing guerrilla forces. I expect that news of the tragedy of the Northern Colombian province of Uraba may have reached the foreign press, where paramilitaries in cahoots with the Army have massacred and terrorized whole peasant populations simply because in legal elections, the left-wing movements held sway. There is now a huge internal refugee problem in Colombia. There is much talk in the military of 'reclaiming' Caqueta and our neighbouring province, Putumayo. Colombia is in a state of unacknowledged civil war, with a weak government and increasing military strength on both left and right, so the situation can only get worse.

I have been told by reliable local people in many areas near here that in the year preceding our arrival in Caqueta (1993), the Colombian Army intensively bombed the huge National Park of Picacachos on the borders of which we live, with the intent of flushing out the guerrillas. Massive damage was done to trees and wild-life and local populations were terrorized. This is one of the many reasons why government exhortations to peasants to 'protect the environment' are met with cynicism.

Tree Revenge

Today is Martyn's birthday, he is 16 and is one of the young people born into this community. A short while back, I feared for his life. He was out cutting firewood alone and suddenly we heard a tremendous cracking and falling of a tree near the house. I grabbed Mary Kelly, his mother, in horror. Then I heard groaning. I stood paralyzed, picturing a fatally wounded boy. The others rushed down to him. Martyn was hurt, but not permanently. His teeth were loose and he was very shocked. He had been cutting a dead tree and its branches, tangled with overhead creepers, had fallen directly on his head.

I told the story to a neighbour who was visiting and he said, 'Yes, that's what happened to Ricardo.' 'What do you mean?' I asked horrified. Ricardo was our neighbour who had died of a brain haemorrhage a few months ago. 'A tree fell on him when he was cutting it down next door to you,' said the neighbour, 'and he was always ill after that. That's why he died.' I was doubly shocked: while Ricardo was chain-sawing those trees next door, my young daughter Louise was sitting quietly beside me,

praying powerfully for retribution from Nature as we were all so upset at what Ricardo was doing. We lost the trees. And we lost a really good friend.

A poem from Louise:

CITY MAN

Hey, city man, what are you doing?
Don't you realize whose life you're destroying?
Don't you see that the things you invent
Are not only killing you, but your environment too?

Maybe you do, but you don't worry,
I'm telling you, city man, one day you'll be sorry:
Where will you run to when your city explodes?
There'll be no more countryside, just desert and roads.

What will you eat, when there's nothing but plastic?
What will you drink, when the water's all poisoned?
What will you breathe, when there's nothing but smoke?
You better change your ways, city man, this isn't a joke.

You've worked so hard and come so far,
Building space ships, tankers, bombs and cars,
But I don't appreciate the things you make,
And think it's time you put on the brake.

Turn around and open your eyes,
Look at the earth, the sea and the skies,
The plants and animals are no longer alive,
Oh city man, don't you realize, if you go on like this, the world will die?

Not-so-welcome Visitors

A group of students recently showed interest in our project and it wasn't the most pleasurable experience of our lives. I was just staggering down the garden path after a morning's work, looking forward to a shower, dinner and staring at the trees from my hammock, when an

alarmed Irishman, Fin, came panting up to me saying, ‘Jenny, look at this.’ I glanced upwards to see a lad just leaving on horseback and read the note Fin brought me: “We are 31 students from the University. We study ecological agro-engineering (or some such mouthful) and we are arriving this afternoon. Greetings.”

I have always like to think of myself as an hospitable, expansive person who can make people welcome under any circumstances. Funny how one’s self image can collapse under stress.

The thing about self-sufficiency is that it doesn’t work if for three-quarters of the year you are gardening with just two women, one overworked man and some kids, and then suddenly your living group expands to a dozen, on top of which 31 large teenagers and three adults suddenly fall upon you. Naturally, I assumed they would have brought some food. They didn’t. I also kind of expected a certain amount of apology or reticence or helpfulness or... well, middle-class English manners. No chance.

At 5.0 a.m. on the morning of the second day of their visit – yes, they had stayed the night, I called Anne with controlled hysteria in my voice. “Anne, would you come into my room, I need to have a fit.” She came, and we looked at each other: ‘OK, what are we going to do with this lot?’ It wasn’t a course in ecology they needed but a finishing school in comportment and manners. We had not a single room that could house the whole group for a meeting or the theatre we had promised and it was raining. Pressure creates solutions: ‘We’ll take the wall down’ I said, and felt better immediately. So, stepping over piles of sleeping bodies, I said gaily in Spanish, ‘Don’t worry if you hear banging, we’re just dismantling the house.’

It worked a treat. Suddenly it felt like our farm again. One or two of them (not many) even offered to help. By the time the tent contingent had come up from the kids’ football field to **demand breakfast** (and coffee) (and more bread) (and jam to *take home*), we had amalgamated our rustic kitchen and sleeping room, organized a question-and-answer meeting, and a production of the greenest items in our theatre.

One of the questions in the meeting was, ‘Why do you let so many weeds grow round your farm?’ This puzzled me, as we spend half our walking lives tending our rather lovely flower and vegetable gardens and house-surrounds. Our children, used to the way Colombians view things, enlightened me: the man evidently meant, ‘Why do you let anything grow at all anywhere near you, tree or bush or shrub or grass?’ Colombians have a Nature-phobia and strip every blade of greenery for yards around their settlements, sit in a patch of mud and call it ‘bonito’ – pretty. We don’t.

The Great Drug-Addict

But they were a superb audience for our theatre. I will describe here just one of the plays. It lasts about 15 minutes, has three scenes, is a comedy with a serious message and is called, 'The Great Drug-Addict'. This refers to the USA as represented by Clinton, or rather a bald Finbar with a straw-coloured wig.

The opening scene has Clinton at his desk in Washington and a Colombian reporter (Louise) interviewing him for TV on the drug problem in the US, which of course he blames entirely on Colombian peasants, threatening invasion if they don't stop growing drug-crops.

Second scene: a Colombian village with two peasants (Martyn and Tristan) grumbling about their economic situation, when their wives (Katie and Laura, both 11 years old), rush in to announce that fumigations are taking place from the air. One peasant (Tristan) then takes up the position that we must become self-sufficient in food and stop growing opium-poppies so as not to invite this kind of attack, whilst a 'clown' peasant, Martyn, makes fun of this noble stand and insists on re-sowing the fumigated land with poppy. Both of the little women want to grown their own vegetables.

Scene Three: Back in Washington, one year later, Louise interviews Clinton who is having a nervous breakdown on his desk. She announces that, due to a new wave of self-sufficiency in Colombia, drug-export to the US has considerably diminished and would Clinton like to tell the world how happy he is about the new situation. Then follows a hilarious fit by 'Clinton' saying how his whole society is falling to pieces, the asylums are full of drug-addicts who can't get their fix, the cities are in chaos, the chemical factories are up in arms about lost trade, the black population is rioting and demanding a black president ... and of course it is all the fault of the Colombian peasants for *not* producing drug crops. 'But Mr. Clinton, I thought you wanted to end the drug-trade?' says the interviewer. 'Idiot!' screams the beleaguered President, 'I didn't mean it! How do you think I'm going to keep the population under control if all Colombia produces is a load of damn CARROTS?!' He collapses crying on the floor. Curtains. The Colombian peasants in the audience love it, and the message gets through.

Pleas for help from abroad for local communities continue to arrive in response to our Campaign. An article in a German magazine about us has been particularly productive: one German lady sent some much-needed financial help; and Marc, a new German friend, has arrived here without announcement and immediately made himself a helpful member of our building and carpentry team. Books, maps, seeds, medical items and, most important of all, warm encouraging and loving letters continue to arrive through the post. Anne is off once again earning money through her astrology amongst the high Bogota bourgeoisie as we are out of candles, matches and nails; and our postmaster in Burtonport, Ireland, lets my daughter Becky send out mountains of 'Green' post 'on tick' when she runs out of money for postage – thank you John! We have Colombians from near

and distant communities come and work with us without pay, just because they like being here – oh, and professor who brought the 31 students says he wants to come back once every 6 months with 31 more. I smiled and breathed and said, ‘Fine, but would you mind giving me a little notice next time?’ as I plotted to send a polite list of requirements, like no smoking marijuana on the football pitch, and could they please bring some rice and porridge.

A lady from Donegal called Judith Hoad has sent us a lovely book of hers called ‘Healing with Herbs’, and for those of you wanting to know more about the fascinating, tragic and ever-changing situation in Colombia, I would highly recommend you write to Mike Simpson for his regular bulletin ‘Colombia Forum’, Las Casas Office, 16, Wellington Road, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 7 BH, England. And for anyone who would like to know *exactly* where we are, here is the Sat-nav. info! 2 degrees 45’02.4 N., 74 degrees 56’31.6 S., 1705 metres above sea level. OK?!

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Love to you all! Jenny James

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URGENT ADITION TO GREEN LETTER No. 19, 20th June 1997

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Regular readers will know that this Green Movement had its unlikely beginnings in the formation of a tiny Green Party in the forsaken wilds of El Pato, Caqueta, and that it was started by Eduardo Rincon, who was elected as the first and only Green councillor on the municipal council of San Vicente del Caguan two and a half years ago.

Since then, Eduardo did so much work for the whole enormous region of San Vicente that people were already greeting him, 'Hallo, Alcalde', which means 'Mayor', and there was no doubt who would become the next Mayor of San Vicente in elections later this year.

But Eduardo is dead. Murdered the day after he attended the handing-over of the 70 soldiers held by the FARC in Caqueta. Shot dead on 16th June 1997 after being tricked into travelling a long distance on a country road by scooter to a phoney meeting with the FARC. He died slowly, bleeding to death from his wounds, a slit throat.

The news has just come to us, and I feel numb. In the first year of Eduardo's green campaign, I often feared for his life, and he talked about the possibility of assassination with us. In those days, it was the FARC we feared. But political differences with the armed movement were ironed out. Eduardo's death is almost certainly the result of political rivalries as he was so immensely popular, completely dedicated to his work, full of energy, in the prime of his life (early 40s) and very charismatic.

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I could never understand the Colombians, how they accepted each new murder so stoically. Had they stopped caring? I would rage at each death, or wave of deaths, of people I never knew. Now I understand. I think of Eduardo night and day, remember every detail of our brief lives together. But I cannot even cry. It is too near to home, too big, too inevitable. It is Colombia.

To those of you who are not paralyzed by the closeness, please let the Colombian Government know that it is not alright. There are hundreds being killed in Uraba in the North, and Eduardo is just one. Just one incredibly active, determined, super-energetic very 'Green' man. And he began this movement of ours in El Pato. That means the pain can never go away. Every step we take is in his footsteps and his shadow is everywhere.

Please send copies of anything you write to the Colombian Embassy or Government to us here.
Eduardo was not a family man. We, and thousands of other people in this part of Caqueta, are his family.

Thank you,
Jenny James

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ASSASSINATION OF EDUARD RINCON, Green Councillor and friend

GREEN LETTER FROM COLOMBIA No. 19, June 12th 1997

To Environmentalists Everywhere, Greetings.

I have before me something I have longed to see ever since this Campaign began. It is a small duplicated sheet in Spanish called 'Resistencia' distributed in rural Colombia by the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and dated April 1997. It carries the title 'Ecological Bulletin' and I am going to translate the whole thing for you. It is of huge significance for this reason: the Colombian Govt. can spout fine-sounding ecological principles (to secure foreign funding), but it is largely hot air. However, whatever the colour of your politics, the fact remains that what the FARC says, goes, as far as the countryside is concerned. And when the red FARC goes Green, there is a glimmer of hope for the environments. Here is the translation:

"It is a fact that the INDISCRIMINATE FELLING OF FORESTS for illegal (drug) crops and for logging has never been of benefit to those who do the work, because to this day, no chainsaw-man or cultivator of narcotic plants has managed to stabilize the economic situation of his family. These

practices have only served to fill the pockets of the big timber and narcotics merchants and all we are left with is an ECOLOGICAL IMBALANCE which is very difficult to repair.

“Because DEFORESTATION does not guarantee social or economic security, we propose to local communities that they SUBSTITUTE ILLEGAL CROPS for legal ones, and use only land which has already been deforested.

“Desiring to help conserve the natural resources of FLORA AND FAUNA which are the guarantee of life for the generations of today and tomorrow, the FARC informs of the following:-

1. IT IS ONLY PERMITTED TO FELL trees for wood when it is a question of building a house, a fence, a bridge, furniture or other necessities connected with the work of the farm. IT IS PROHIBITED to fell for marketing the timber.
2. TREES WHICH ARE FELLED must be more than 20 years old, and MUST NOT BE LESS than 100 metres distant from water-sources, or 50 metres from waterways and streams, nor must they be taken from AREAS WHERE EROSION IS PREVALENT.
3. THE TREES FOR FELLING MUST NOT BE THE ONLY ONES IN THE AREA, that is, the principal sources of guaranteeing humidity of the surrounding land.
4. THE ONLY TIMBER THAT CAN BE COMMERCIALIZED is wood that is taken out when a farm is established or when through *force majeure*, trees fall down naturally in cultivated land.
5. FOR EVERY TREE WHICH IS CUT, a minimum of three must be planted and these must be suitable for the type of soil and climate.
6. LIKEWISE IT IS PROHIBITED to contaminate any waterways, and it is the responsibility of each farm-owner to channel dirty water from his household or toilets in such a way that it does not reach other living accommodation, schools or rivers.
7. BURNING MAY ONLY BE CARRIED OUT when fields are being cleared for crops, and only with the necessary security measures, namely: checking on all sides to make sure the fire doesn't spread and informing neighbours so they can take safety precautions. BURNING IS NOT PERMITTED FOR ANY OTHER REASON OR IN ANY OTHER MANNER.
8. FISHING IS ALLOWED ONLY FOR FAMILY CONSUMPTION and only using fish-hooks. IT IS ABSOLUTELY PROHIBITED to use any other sort of instruments, poisons, explosives or other contaminatory substances.

9. THE HUNTING OF ANY TYPE OF ANIMAL, WHETHER FUR OR FEATHER IS ABSOLUTELY BANNED, even under pretext of defending crops: other methods of scaring pest-animals away must be used.

10. WHEN THERE IS ANY INTENTION OF FELLING FOREST OR CUTTING TREES for any reason whatever, prior notice must be given so that the real necessity for this can be verified.

NOTE: THESE NORMS WILL BE RIGIDLY APPLIED FROM 1ST MAY 1997. FAILING TO COMPLY WITH OR VIOLATING SAME WILL BE PUNISHED IN PROPORTION TO THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE OFFENCE WITH FINES OF BETWEEN 100,000 AND 1,000,000 PESOS WHICH WILL BE HANDED OVER TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY ACTION GROUPS FOR WORKS OF BENEFIT TO THE WHOLE COMMUNITY.

The local Community Action Groups, in co-ordination with our movement (FARC) will be authorized to carry out, and responsible for, vigilance and seeing that these rules are complied with.

Signed: (FARC High Command)

Against such a background, our Campaign feels more meaningful than ever. It must also be pointed out that there is a tremendous movement amongst the right-wing military at the moment to 'reclaim' the 'lost' areas of Colombia – lost, that is, to the left-wing guerrilla forces. I expect that news of the tragedy of the Northern Colombian province of Uraba may have reached the foreign press, where paramilitaries in cahoots with the Army have massacred and terrorized whole peasant populations simply because in legal elections, the left-wing movements held sway. There is now a huge internal refugee problem in Colombia. There is much talk in the military of 'reclaiming' Caqueta and our neighbouring province, Putumayo. Colombia is in a state of unacknowledged civil war, with a weak government and increasing military strength on both left and right, so the situation can only get worse.

I have been told by reliable local people in many areas near here that in the year preceding our arrival in Caqueta (1993), the Colombian Army intensively bombed the huge National Park of Picacachos on the borders of which we live, with the intent of flushing out the guerrillas. Massive damage was done to trees and wild-life and local populations were terrorized. This is one of the many reasons why government exhortations to peasants to 'protect the environment' are met with cynicism.

Tree Revenge

Today is Martyn's birthday, he is 16 and is one of the young people born into this community. A short while back, I feared for his life. He was out cutting firewood alone and suddenly we heard a tremendous cracking and falling of a tree near the house. I grabbed Mary Kelly, his mother, in horror. Then I heard groaning. I stood paralyzed, picturing a fatally wounded boy. The others rushed down to him. Martyn was hurt, but not permanently. His teeth were loose and he was very shocked. He had been cutting a dead tree and its branches, tangled with overhead creepers, had fallen directly on his head.

I told the story to a neighbour who was visiting and he said, 'Yes, that's what happened to Ricardo.' 'What do you mean?' I asked horrified. Ricardo was our neighbour who had died of a brain haemorrhage a few months ago. 'A tree fell on him when he was cutting it down next door to you,' said the neighbour, 'and he was always ill after that. That's why he died.' I was doubly shocked: while Ricardo was chain-sawing those trees next door, my young daughter Louise was sitting quietly beside me, praying powerfully for retribution from Nature as we were all so upset at what Ricardo was doing. We lost the trees. And we lost a really good friend.

A poem from Louise:

CITY MAN

Hey, city man, what are you doing?
Don't you realize whose life you're destroying?
Don't you see that the things you invent
Are not only killing you, but your environment too?

Maybe you do, but you don't worry,
I'm telling you, city man, one day you'll be sorry:
Where will you run to when your city explodes?
There'll be no more countryside, just desert and roads.

What will you eat, when there's nothing but plastic?

What will you drink, when the water's all poisoned?
What will you breathe, when there's nothing but smoke?
You better change your ways, city man, this isn't a joke.

You've worked so hard and come so far,
Building space ships, tankers, bombs and cars,
But I don't appreciate the things you make,
And think it's time you put on the brake.

Turn around and open your eyes,
Look at the earth, the sea and the skies,
The plants and animals are no longer alive,
Oh city man, don't you realize, if you go on like this, the world will die?

Not-so-welcome Visitors

A group of students recently showed interest in our project and it wasn't the most pleasurable experience of our lives. I was just staggering down the garden path after a morning's work, looking forward to a shower, dinner and staring at the trees from my hammock, when an alarmed Irishman, Fin, came panting up to me saying, 'Jenny, look at this.' I glanced upwards to see a lad just leaving on horseback and read the note Fin brought me: "We are 31 students from the University. We study ecological agro-engineering (or some such mouthful) and we are arriving this afternoon. Greetings."

I have always like to think of myself as an hospitable, expansive person who can make people welcome under any circumstances. Funny how one's self image can collapse under stress.

The thing about self-sufficiency is that it doesn't work if for three-quarters of the year you are gardening with just two women, one overworked man and some kids, and then suddenly your living group expands to a dozen, on top of which 31 large teenagers and three adults suddenly fall upon you. Naturally, I assumed they would have brought some food. They didn't. I also kind of expected a certain amount of apology or reticence or helpfulness or... well, middle-class English manners. No chance.

At 5.0 a.m. on the morning of the second day of their visit – yes, they had stayed the night, I called Anne with controlled hysteria in my voice. "Anne, would you come into my room, I need to have a fit." She came, and we looked at each other: 'OK, what are we going to do with this lot?' It wasn't a course in ecology they needed but a finishing school in comportment and manners. We had not a single room that could house the whole group for a meeting or the

theatre we had promised and it was raining. Pressure creates solutions: ‘We’ll take the wall down’ I said, and felt better immediately. So, stepping over piles of sleeping bodies, I said gaily in Spanish, ‘Don’t worry if you hear banging, we’re just dismantling the house.’

It worked a treat. Suddenly it felt like our farm again. One or two of them (not many) even offered to help. By the time the tent contingent had come up from the kids’ football field to **demand breakfast** (and coffee) (and more bread) (and jam to *take home*), we had amalgamated our rustic kitchen and sleeping room, organized a question-and-answer meeting, and a production of the greenest items in our theatre.

One of the questions in the meeting was, ‘Why do you let so many weeds grow round your farm?’ This puzzled me, as we spend half our waking lives tending our rather lovely flower and vegetable gardens and house-surrounds. Our children, used to the way Colombians view things, enlightened me: the man evidently meant, ‘Why do you let anything grow at all anywhere near you, tree or bush or shrub or grass?’ Colombians have a Nature-phobia and strip every blade of greenery for yards around their settlements, sit in a patch of mud and call it ‘bonito’ – pretty. We don’t.

The Great Drug-Addict

But they were a superb audience for our theatre. I will describe here just one of the plays. It lasts about 15 minutes, has three scenes, is a comedy with a serious message and is called, ‘The Great Drug-Addict’. This refers to the USA as represented by Clinton, or rather a bald Finbar with a straw-coloured wig.

The opening scene has Clinton at his desk in Washington and a Colombian reporter (Louise) interviewing him for TV on the drug problem in the US, which of course he blames entirely on Colombian peasants, threatening invasion if they don’t stop growing drug-crops.

Second scene: a Colombian village with two peasants (Martyn and Tristan) grumbling about their economic situation, when their wives (Katie and Laura, both 11 years old), rush in to announce that fumigations are taking place from the air. One peasant (Tristan) then takes up the position that we must become self-sufficient in food and stop growing opium-poppies so as not to invite this kind of attack, whilst a ‘clown’ peasant, Martyn, makes fun of this noble stand and insists on re-sowing the fumigated land with poppy. Both of the little women want to grown their own vegetables.

Scene Three: Back in Washington, one year later, Louise interviews Clinton who is having a nervous breakdown on his desk. She announces that, due to a new wave of self-sufficiency in Colombia, drug-export to the US has considerably diminished and would Clinton like to tell the world how happy he is about the new situation. Then follows a hilarious fit by ‘Clinton’ saying

how his whole society is falling to pieces, the asylums are full of drug-addicts who can't get their fix, the cities are in chaos, the chemical factories are up in arms about lost trade, the black population is rioting and demanding a black president ... and of course it is all the fault of the Colombian peasants for *not* producing drug crops. 'But Mr. Clinton, I thought you wanted to end the drug-trade?' says the interviewer. 'Idiot!' screams the beleaguered President, 'I didn't mean it! How do you think I'm going to keep the population under control if all Colombia produces is a load of damn CARROTS?!' He collapses crying on the floor. Curtains. The Colombian peasants in the audience love it, and the message gets through.

Pleas for help from abroad for local communities continue to arrive in response to our Campaign. An article in a German magazine about us has been particularly productive: one German lady sent some much-needed financial help; and Marc, a new German friend, has arrived here without announcement and immediately made himself a helpful member of our building and carpentry team. Books, maps, seeds, medical items and, most important of all, warm encouraging and loving letters continue to arrive through the post. Anne is off once again earning money through her astrology amongst the high Bogota bourgeoisie as we are out of candles, matches and nails; and our postmaster in Burtonport, Ireland, lets my daughter Becky send out mountains of 'Green' post 'on tick' when she runs out of money for postage – thank you John! We have Colombians from near and distant communities come and work with us without pay, just because they like being here – oh, and professor who brought the 31 students says he wants to come back once every 6 months with 31 more. I smiled and breathed and said, 'Fine, but would you mind giving me a little notice next time?' as I plotted to send a polite list of requirements, like no smoking marijuana on the football pitch, and could they please bring some rice and porridge.

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Thank you,
Jenny James

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GREEN LETTER 21 from Colombia, 7th September 1997

Death is contagious. Sometimes when there is too much of it around, it makes you feel like dying. That's how I felt the last few days after receiving confirmation of the death of Enrique, my 'Green' guerrilla commander friend, who once said revolution would come more surely to Colombia through a packet of seeds than through any bullet.

It matters how we die. If Enrique had been killed in combat - well, he was fighting on one side of a long-winded guerrilla war. But Enrique was executed. By his own side.

I have tried to rationalise, tell myself that Enrique had killed people; that he knew the rules; that he was asking for it. But it doesn't work; I still mind that Enrique is dead and the way he died. His girlfriend begged him to leave the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), to go and live with her in the towns. He had a large sum of FARC money in his possession, entrusted to him for the purchase of provisions. He made his illusory bid for comfort and safety. They caught him of course. He was made to kneel down and Manolo, once my next-door neighbour and husband of a friend of mine, now Enrique's 'apprentice', was given the order to shoot him.

Enrique had once tried to tell me, sitting here on my bed in this room, that Eduardo Rincon, our Green councillor, also recently 'executed' for goodness-knows-what supposed crime, was a 'paramilitary'. I told Enrique as nicely as I could that that was nonsense. Enrique had insisted; so I said, OK, if Eduardo is a paramilitary, how come you don't kill him? Which is precisely what the FARC would do if they really believed it. All this was two years ago. Enrique had answered, 'But Jenny, we are all human, we all make mistakes, and we can change. Eduardo is doing good now.' So I pushed and said, 'Is Eduardo's life in danger from the FARC?' No, no, no, I was assured.

We still don't know who killed Eduardo; but now we know who killed Enrique. Sometimes living in Colombia feels like walking into a psychotic novel. Two fine men, formerly my best friends in this area, both working in their own dedicated ways for the good of Colombia and both passionately against the destruction of the forests; and both - possibly - killed by the very movement that has most chance of saving those forests and the peasants who live near them. And one is supposed to stay sane in these circumstances.

It so happened that when I got the news, there was no-one on the farm to talk to. My garden saved me. I sat with the earth running through my hands, my heart breaking inside. I remembered Enrique admiring that very garden - bringing young guerrillas to see it; and I felt the earth, made of millions of bodies of dead creatures, and saw the fresh green life springing up from it, and thought of my dead friends. So many people who still have enthusiasm for life, ripped away; and when people like myself would gladly sink into the earth and say, 'No more', this option is not given to us.

A little girl called Amy Pepper of Scaynes Hill Primary School in Sussex has sent this poem:

Man comes through
Trees fall down

Roads built
Then a town.
Dangerous fumes
From factories nearby
A horrid gas
Covers the sky.
Man comes
Trees fall
Killing the trees
And killing us all.

Thank you Amy. You are one of the many reasons why I will continue tending my garden.

Anne and the Paramilitaries

Being an astrologer in Bogota leads you into strange waters.

Anne was told that the head of a 'security company' who just happened to be Irish was interested in supporting CRAC and would she please phone him? His assistant answered, with a Southern Irish accent. He was friendly and shamelessly offered Anne money in exchange for 'information'. Anne, shocked, said she had no intention of taking up spying for a living. "No, no", it wasn't spying, it was just to let them know who was in the region...

Anne refused and was about to hang up when the Irishman insisted she should meet him and his boss for lunch the next day. Out of curiosity, Anne went, where she met one Bill Nixon, a big blonde Northern Irish Protestant, and his assistant from the South, Eddie O'Brien. She gave them a set of the Green Letters and talked about our work. The boss then offered her ten thousand dollars "to gather information". Anne was outraged. "If I was going to spy, it would be for the other side," she said, that is for the revolutionary peasants' movement. Again the men insisted that it wasn't spying and that they just wanted to prove to big oil investors like Shell and BP who are their main employers that investing in oil exploitation in the 'red zones' of Colombia is possible. He was also trying to convince Anne that he was deeply 'green' himself as his aeroplanes also detect oil spills!

He freely talked about his work: his men, he said, about 300 well-armed Colombians, protect 'important visitors' and important machinery for the oil companies. Anne asked him what he did in Ireland. He was in the British Army. "I used to throw stones on the Bogside at people like you," Anne said. The Southern Irish lackey laughed behind his hand.

Then, after unsuccessfully attempting to get Anne tipsy with 'Irish coffee', they asked her whether she would be willing to give conferences to the top brass of the big oil companies on the 'psychology' of living peacefully in a Red Zone and that they'd pay her well. Anne answered, 'Yes, of course, as long as I can say absolutely anything I like'. Her cheeky grin made them rescind the offer!

This green campaign gets weirder by the day.

The President's cousin's mountain 'dog'

Remember the wild animal I once found chained in Ricardo's shower and purchased to set free? A 'mountain dog' (perro de monte) that had something of small Bear, something of Cat, of Weasel, of Bushbaby - and little of Dog.

Recently, as night fell, I jumped out of my bed with a scream as something warm, furry and definitely carnivorous snuffled around for bare flesh. It was a 'mountain dog', but not Ricardo's. This one Louise had brought home at the request of a client of Anne's who had had it in captivity for years and wanted it freed. The client's name was Mady Samper, a cousin of the Colombian President.

Lou travelled a hot, unpleasant journey to a far-distant place, took the overfed, tied, frightened creature on horrible bus-rides where, after dark - it is nocturnal - it bit deeply into the hands of an English visitor accompanying Louise. Arriving in Neiva, the police, quite correctly, confiscated the animal under the law forbidding trafficking in wildlife. Louise, in tears, in vain tried to explain the creature was being taken home to the wilds and that their manhandling of it was making it more vicious and terrified.

It was 3.00 am when Anne in Bogota received Louise's tearful phone-call from Neiva and many hours and phone-calls later that a mysteriously transformed Neiva policewoman silently handed over the animal to Louise. She had just received orders from the Chief of Police in Colombia, Sr. Serrano, who just happened to be a friend of Mrs. Samper.

We are now officially, thanks to Anne's wading through red-tape and pulling a few strings, an 'Hogar de Transito' - a 'halfway house' for wild animals being returned to their natural homes. However, the 'perro de monte' had other ideas, and that's why he ended up in my bed on that, and many another, night. We took him across the stream. He came home. We took him to the forest. He came home. We resorted to locking him up at night. It took him all of five minutes to get out (each time). He liked my lemon tea, which he drank carefully, holding the cup in his hands. And he liked the cuddles. And he particularly liked my bed.

I was desperate. Without my customary 10 hours' sleep (you need it in this kind of life-style), I am useless. He had to go. The kids took him on a long, long, walk, far into the forest, in very rainy weather along a knee-deep muddy path. For many nights, I slept tensely, expecting the usual hiss and plonk! as he landed on my roof and in through my window, to demand I get up and play.

Can you imagine how odd it feels to feel horribly guilty for having successfully returned a wild animal to its natural habitat where there is no lemon tea?

Anne and Louise on Colombian radio

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And thankyou everyone for all the magnificent seeds, letters, printed matter (especially Marcey in the USA for the lovely organic gardening books) and other gifts.

Bless you all.

Love, *Jenny*.

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me of this, I was able to put him off. These particular skills are not useful here: please only come if you're used to using your body, fully.

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In spite of which, we have had some brilliant help, fascinating encounters and good friendship. When there has been suffering, we guarantee it is on both sides.

For a successful visit, you need:

a gutsy in-touchness with your body; a intense de-bourgeoisification programme before you get here; a willingness to use all of yourself all of the time (we do); a sense of humour! the flexibility to handle your own culture-shock without getting into a foul mood with those who love most that which you most hate.

WRITE FIRST!

Good luck!

Jenny.

PS An old friend Rob, now known as John Moon, of Box Cottage, 5 Tinhead Road, Edington, Westbury, Wiltshire BA13 4PH England, has reproduced all the 'Green Letters' in an attractive bound booklet, with a jungle-drawing of Louise's on the front and is selling them, for £5 I think, in aid of CRAC. Please write to him if you'd like to buy or sell some. Thank you.

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ENRIQUE EXECUTED

Anne invited to spy for the Paramilitaries...

The President's Cousin's Mountain Dog

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Speaking Irish in the Jungle

What Not To Do if you come to Caqueta

Caquetá Rainforest Campaign

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GREEN LETTER 21 from Colombia, 7th September 1997

Death is contagious. Sometimes when there is too much of it around, it makes you feel like dying. That's how I felt the last few days after receiving confirmation of the death of Enrique, my 'Green' guerrilla commander friend, who once said revolution would come more surely to Colombia through a packet of seeds than through any bullet.

It matters how we die. If Enrique had been killed in combat - well, he was fighting on one side of a long-winded guerrilla war. But Enrique was executed. By his own side.

I have tried to rationalise, tell myself that Enrique had killed people; that he knew the rules; that he was asking for it. But it doesn't work; I still mind that Enrique is dead and the way he died. His girlfriend begged him to leave the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), to go and live with her in the towns. He had a large sum of FARC money in his possession, entrusted to him for the purchase of provisions. He made his illusory bid for comfort and safety. They caught him of course. He was made to

kneel down and Manolo, once my next-door neighbour and husband of a friend of mine, now Enrique's 'apprentice', was given the order to shoot him.

Enrique had once tried to tell me, sitting here on my bed in this room, that Eduardo Rincon, our Green councillor, also recently 'executed' for goodness-knows-what supposed crime, was a 'paramilitary'. I told Enrique as nicely as I could that that was nonsense. Enrique had insisted; so I said, OK, if Eduardo is a paramilitary, how come you don't kill him? Which is precisely what the FARC would do if they really believed it. All this was two years ago. Enrique had answered, 'But Jenny, we are all human, we all make mistakes, and we can change. Eduardo is doing good now.' So I pushed and said, 'Is Eduardo's life in danger from the FARC?' No, no, no, I was assured.

We still don't know who killed Eduardo; but now we know who killed Enrique. Sometimes living in Colombia feels like walking into a psychotic novel. Two fine men, formerly my best friends in this area, both working in their own dedicated ways for the good of Colombia and both passionately against the destruction of the forests; and both - possibly - killed by the very movement that has most chance of saving those forests and the peasants who live near them. And one is supposed to stay sane in these circumstances.

It so happened that when I got the news, there was no-one on the farm to talk to. My garden saved me. I sat with the earth running through my hands, my heart breaking inside. I remembered Enrique admiring that very garden - bringing young guerrillas to see it; and I felt the earth, made of millions of bodies of dead creatures, and saw the fresh green life springing up from it, and thought of my dead friends. So many people who still have enthusiasm for life, ripped away; and when people like myself would gladly sink into the earth and say, 'No more', this option is not given to us.

A little girl called Amy Pepper of Scaynes Hill Primary School in Sussex has sent this poem:

Man comes through
Trees fall down
Roads built
Then a town.
Dangerous fumes
From factories nearby
A horrid gas
Covers the sky.
Man comes
Trees fall
Killing the trees
And killing us all.

Thank you Amy. You are one of the many reasons why I will continue tending my garden.

Anne and the Paramilitaries

Being an astrologer in Bogota leads you into strange waters.

Anne was told that the head of a 'security company' who just happened to be Irish was interested in supporting CRAC and would she please phone him? His assistant answered, with a Southern Irish accent. He was friendly and shamelessly offered Anne money in exchange for 'information'. Anne,

shocked, said she had no intention of taking up spying for a living. “No, no”, it wasn't spying, it was just to let them know who was in the region...

Anne refused and was about to hang up when the Irishman insisted she should meet him and his boss for lunch the next day. Out of curiosity, Anne went, where she met one Bill Nixon, a big blonde Northern Irish Protestant, and his assistant from the South, Eddie O'Brien. She gave them a set of the Green Letters and talked about our work. The boss then offered her ten thousand dollars “to gather information”. Anne was outraged. “If I was going to spy, it would be for the other side,” she said, that is for the revolutionary peasants' movement. Again the men insisted that it wasn't spying and that they just wanted to prove to big oil investors like Shell and BP who are their main employers that investing in oil exploitation in the 'red zones' of Colombia is possible. He was also trying to convince Anne that he was deeply 'green' himself as his aeroplanes also detect oil spills!

He freely talked about his work: his men, he said, about 300 well-armed Colombians, protect 'important visitors' and important machinery for the oil companies. Anne asked him what he did in Ireland. He was in the British Army. “I used to throw stones on the Bogside at people like you,” Anne said. The Southern Irish lackey laughed behind his hand.

Then, after unsuccessfully attempting to get Anne tipsy with 'Irish coffee', they asked her whether she would be willing to give conferences to the top brass of the big oil companies on the 'psychology' of living peacefully in a Red Zone and that they'd pay her well. Anne answered, 'Yes, of course, as long as I can say absolutely anything I like'. Her cheeky grin made them rescind the offer!

This green campaign gets weirder by the day.

The President's cousin's mountain 'dog'

Remember the wild animal I once found chained in Ricardo's shower and purchased to set free? A 'mountain dog' (perro de monte) that had something of small Bear, something of Cat, of Weasel, of Bushbaby - and little of Dog.

Recently, as night fell, I jumped out of my bed with a scream as something warm, furry and definitely carnivorous snuffled around for bare flesh. It was a 'mountain dog', but not Ricardo's. This one Louise had brought home at the request of a client of Anne's who had had it in captivity for years and wanted it freed. The client's name was Mady Samper, a cousin of the Colombian President.

Lou travelled a hot, unpleasant journey to a far-distant place, took the overfed, tied, frightened creature on horrible bus-rides where, after dark - it is nocturnal - it bit deeply into the hands of an English visitor accompanying Louise. Arriving in Neiva, the police, quite correctly, confiscated the animal under the law forbidding trafficking in wildlife. Louise, in tears, in vain tried to explain the creature was being taken home to the wilds and that their manhandling of it was making it more vicious and terrified.

It was 3.00 am when Anne in Bogota received Louise's tearful phone-call from Neiva and many hours and phone-calls later that a mysteriously transformed Neiva policewoman silently handed over the animal to Louise. She had just received orders from the Chief of Police in Colombia, Sr. Serrano, who just happened to be a friend of Mrs. Samper.

We are now officially, thanks to Anne's wading through red-tape and pulling a few strings, an 'Hogar de Transito' - a 'halfway house' for wild animals being returned to their natural homes. However, the 'perro de monte' had other ideas, and that's why he ended up in my bed on that, and many another, night. We took him across the stream. He came home. We took him to the forest. He came home. We resorted to locking him up at night. It took him all of five minutes to get out (each time). He liked my lemon tea, which he drank carefully, holding the cup in his hands. And he liked the cuddles. And he particularly liked my bed.

I was desperate. Without my customary 10 hours' sleep (you need it in this kind of life-style), I am useless. He had to go. The kids took him on a long, long, walk, far into the forest, in very rainy weather along a knee-deep muddy path. For many nights, I slept tensely, expecting the usual hiss and plonk! as he landed on my roof and in through my window, to demand I get up and play.

Can you imagine how odd it feels to feel horribly guilty for having successfully returned a wild animal to its natural habitat where there is no lemon tea?

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Our Green Theatre goes to Bogota

Air Attack

Strange donations from strange quarters..

Becky back after 3 years describes our farm ...

And much more.

Caquetá Rainforest Campaign

GREEN LETTER NO. 23 from COLOMBIA, December 1997

To all our 'Green Friends' in Europe and elsewhere –

Greetings after a two-month gap, a longer time-lapse than usual: not because we have packed up the Campaign, but quite the opposite - we have been busier than ever.

Just after the last Green Letter went out, we received news from Anne in Bogotá that we had been invited to perform our 'Green Theatre' in a month-long Festival in Bogotá, beginning 22nd November. And that 'as we'd be in Bogotá anyway, she'd arranged a few other performances as well'...

Action stations: move 10 people and several mule-loads of theatre gear down the mountain and on to buses for Bogotá. Find someone to make sure the farm didn't turn back to jungle in our absence. Freshen up and practice our country theatre for a city audience. Cope with the kids' objections to the move - 'But everyone in Bogotá will be so much better than us'... Send someone to our Tolima settlement (a 2-day journey) to care for the farm - keep the farm-work going at full pelt in the mornings, work all afternoon at theatre practice - yes, it was a busy time!

Bugged by Bog. Smog

Bogotá has to be breathed to be believed. Pollution takes on a whole new scale of meaning. London would seem like the Lake District in comparison. I held my breath for 3 weeks there. The children were shocked, physically and mentally. Each one in turn developed fevers, swollen throats, chronic dry skin, spots on previously exquisite complexions and colds. At one point, with two days before our first performance, my best actors and singers were voiceless.

But we did it, and the children will never be scared of their 'standard' again: the reception was tremendous. Invitations poured in to perform elsewhere but we had to let a lot of people down and escape back to the real world, which is definitely not the city. No fame or bright lights could seduce these youngsters - they've known something better: grass, trees, real water and air. The harassed director (me!) had a big enough job suppressing the rebellion long enough to do even the three shows initially promised.

AIR ATTACK

On 12th December, I was back on my farm. The jungle had started to take over, and so had the drought. But at least there was peace... until the next morning that is, when all hell set loose above us. Our friends the helicopters and fumigation planes were back in strength, but this time all their attention was on our side of the valley, and specifically the farm next door where the city-dwelling Evangelist landlord has his present workers tending a large opium-poppy crop. For hours the aircraft swooped low, passing and re-

passing our gardens. Then the shooting began, 'indiscriminate' shooting into the trees to warn any lurking guerrillas - a Spanish girl staying with us and a near neighbour happened to be passing along our leafy pathways and the shots landed uncomfortably close: they hugged trees, and not for the trees' protection.

After my initial shock and anger at the shooting, I decided valour was the better part of discretion and placed myself in full view, out in the open, and furiously tended my garden for the duration of the performance, breathing deeply and trusting their satanic technology included distinguishing marigolds from poppies from the air. After 3 hours of these antics, which included dropping off soldiers in the neighbouring farm to burn crops, one breathless and scared farm-worker who had previously displayed only cynicism about our work, came scampering round to us for protection: he had been shot at as he ran into the forest and had hidden inside a hollow tree-trunk. Like a repentant sinner, he kept making promises to us that he would never again get involved in working on poppy-crops, as if somehow we had the power to 'save' him from the gringos in the air.

If anyone over there is on speaking terms with Mr. Tony Blair, would they please mention to him that this is not the most intelligent way to deal with the drug problem? The only life forms punished are the wildlife and vegetation - our 'repentant sinner' was of course working in the only way he knows as soon as the crisis was past.

"Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead.

Criminal Corporation donates to CRAC...

We have had some odd contributors to the Campaign recently: Carton Colombia, run by Mr. Smurfit of Ireland, one of the greatest criminals in terms of destroying old forests, planting sterile eucalyptus, uprooting indigenous peoples - and using lethal force to do so - has donated us 30 large files and mountains of typing paper. As will be seen from these comments, they chose a really rotten PR woman if they hoped to get good press for this 'generous' act...

Who Wants Porcelain Loos in the Jungle?!

And Corona Toilet Company has donated 3 toilets, washbasins and sets of tiles! We will pass these on to the local schools as we used earth closets, stream water from a black hosepipe - and where would we put the tiles?

In Ireland, a long-term opponent of our atheistic community (I mean, 20 years long!) made friends with Becky and purchased a small strip of land at the side of our house for £5,000 (Irish punts) - it was worth all of £1,000 - with which Becky financed her return here, left money for Mary Kelly who has taken over office work there to run things, and began to pay back an old debt to a loyal supporter, Rob (now known as John Moon). If anyone wonders why John has not answered letters or continued with his excellent production of the children's jungle paintings and the green letters, he has suffered a personal tragedy in the birth of a brain-damaged child and has been tied up with coping with this for many months. Rob-John - our thoughts are with you.

Retribution from a Thief – Unique in Colombia!

But perhaps the oddest contributor is Leonel. He is a young Colombian thief who staged an armed robbery on our Tolima farm in 1991 in which I had to hand over all we owned to save the life of a young

Englishman living with us who had a gun to his head. Subsequently, we disobeyed every Colombian rule about 'keeping quiet' - a disease rampant here even when the criminals are known - and the result, all these years later is that the sum of money stolen is being paid back with interest, unheard of in Colombia - it has simply never happened before. Leonel called to make his latest payment during the theatre in Bogotá- and offered all the children jeans from his brother's factory in addition. He claims the robbery was 'the worst thing that "ever happened to him"'. I seem to remember it was **us** it happened to!

"The world is now too dangerous for anything less than Utopia."

Buckminster Fuller (quote nicked from *Kathleen Jannaway* of the Vegan Movement - thank you Kathleen, I'm sure you won't mind!)

What Becky Saw on Returning Home

I asked Becky to write her first impressions on returning to Colombia. Here is her account, from 9th November:

"For the past three years, I have been helping to run our Irish base. The time came to return home to my family roots on the edge of the cloud forest near Rovira, Caquetá. Many people in Europe ask me, ' But what is it like to really live there?' So here is a day in the life of our Caquetá farm:

The bus from Neiva - which is an extremely hot town - has open sides, no glass; I wanted to see where I was coming to, so I sat up on the roof of the bus with all the peasants' luggage. The journey takes about 4 hours, stopping all along the way to let people off. The road gets steeper and more winding, the landscape is stripped of every tree and men are out burning the last tiny shrubs and dry grass. Nevertheless, there are still (much reduced) rivers and the shapes of the mountains are a million times more interesting than the flat lands between Bogotá and Neiva.

Because of our project, the people on the bus were friendly and were asking how many hours it is to walk to our place once you get off the bus - 3 hours at least. We passed many road workers with huge machines constantly clearing away the earth that had slid down the mountain: without trees, there is simply nothing to hold the earth in place. I kept seeing the land like a human body which had had all its hair pulled out and whose skin was being scraped away to see only bones left.

Arriving in Rovira, there are just a few wooden shacks, some are bars with open spaces for the weekend discos. We left our luggage with a trusted friend (Aminta of the 'Blue Restaurant') and began the long trek to the farm. Jenny often stresses how steep it is in her Green Letters, but not till you start to climb and feel your heart beating do you truly realise how steep! We stopped and rested every time we found a flattish area (there aren't many!) The first bridge you cross is a fallen tree-trunk...

Past the halfway mark, you are high enough to feel a welcome mountain breeze; higher still, a few trees and the air feels cooler; approaching our farm, you walk under tall trees and life starts to feel magical again. Entering the farm, there are plants, bushes, flowers and vegetable gardens everywhere, a place to hang hammocks, four living cabins, banana palms, guinea-pigs, chickens, creeping plants. I was here three years ago and the biggest change is that the forest feels closer. Jenny and the others have let all the trees close by grow - before it looked much more stripped. Give Nature a chance and she really does heal herself.

Masses of work has been done here; the life-style is very intense. To be here, you would have to love using your body. The day starts with one of the men getting up at 5 a.m. to light the wood stove that stays alight all day to cook, heat water, make bread and feed everyone three times a day. The cows get milked and one by one everyone gets up. By 7 a.m., the whole place is swinging along; every detail is essential to the upkeep of the place and to our survival. Before breakfast at 8 a.m., clothes have been washed, vegetables picked and cleaned, animals fed, bedrooms cleaned. After breakfast, everyone does heavy work in the gardens, permanent crop-fields, wood fetching and cutting, animal care, building and mending and fixing, cooking and kitchen work. Some work is dependent on the weather - panic stations for drought or flood! In one day you may get mist, rain, hot sun, gusts of wind, nippy nights.

When I arrived, everyone was preparing for the theatre show in Bogotá. The kids put on some of their plays to practice and show me what they have been doing - that is, in the afternoon, after work. Immediately after dinner at midday, there is time to play, talk, do music, rest, write - and the kids have a football pitch for those that still have energy left after the long morning's work. Then at 3 p.m., practice time, with Jenny teaching the girls ballet, yoga, lots of body movement, everyone coming up with ideas for the new theatre and ways of freshening up previous shows. This goes on till the older ones of us have had enough (I'm in my 30s!), but the kids often go off to practice more.

There is food available until the kitchen closes about 7 p.m. Normally, by 8.0 p.m., everyone is in bed. I must say I'm not usually a non-physical person, but after a few days here I got fully stretched and can feel muscles I'd forgotten I have. A mixture of earthy physical work and creativity makes for a very full and satisfying life-style."

Becky.

Another Strange Visit – and even stranger news

One quiet day before all this, two men came up the path. One, a neighbour who had been felling forest and nicking land belonging to us high up where he thought we'd never notice. We didn't, but neighbours did, and told us. The second man, in city clothes, was from INCORA, the government land-title agency. I felt calm, no adrenaline - odd, as on the face of it, it could have been a hostile visit.

It was embarrassing. Not only did the Incora man praise our work and come down heavily against our poor neighbour, but urged me to claim all the un-owned (government) forest in our area 'to protect it'. So offensive were his 'green' lectures over dinner to poor Merardo, our transgressing neighbour, that I jumped to his defence (I'm a wonderful hypocrite at times) and said that it was all very well to lecture the peasants when one had a well-paid government job, but without help and guidance, all they knew was to cut forest and cultivate heroin poppies. I think Merardo went away a little confused. The Incora man, who was from the Gnostic movement, loved our vegetarian food, fell in love with Louise who sang him her latest, very beautiful environmental song called 'Yesterday, there was a tree.....' and begged us all to visit him in Belen, his far-distant hot Caquetá home and set up a 'branch of our community' there. Some hopes, we can hardly handle the branches we already have!

This extraordinary event was followed up with one even more bizarre: in Bogotá we had just finished practising our loveliest piece called 'The battle for the Forests' when Anne calmly told us that she hadn't liked to interrupt, but a government man had been on the phone. He wanted to speak to me with the news that, in a big community meeting in El Pato (our region), it had been agreed by the guerrilla, the

government, the local people - including several notable former enemies of our work - and their mothers that we should be appointed 'Guardians of the Forest' to take care of all the remaining virgin forest in the area.

I'm sorry, this is too much for me to swallow and I need time to recover. I have no idea what this means in practical terms and await instructions from the cosmos.

But all we do is grow lettuces..... what happened?

"If we don't do the impossible, we will be faced with the unthinkable."

(Sorry, forgot to make a note of the author.)

"CRAC: Big enough to make a difference. Small enough to keep contact personal." (This slogan is mine!)

More news after your Christmas, our hottest, driest season.

Good luck with all your own work, and bless you all for making this strange Campaign possible.

Jenny.

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A wonderful letter from Camilo the teacher

Colombian Rainforest Campaign

GREEN LETTER No. 24 from Icononzo, Tolima, Colombia 17th February 1998

On 25 January I was in Bogotá on Campaign business when I received a phone call from Ned (one of our group) in Neiva.

"Jenny, the FARC have said we have to leave the region. We have one week to pack."

In 10 minutes I was in a taxi headed for the bus terminal, feeling strangely calm, planning, organizing in silence, my brain full of questions. The Revolutionary Army had given no reason for their order.

During the long night time bus journey to Neiva, the bus company throw videos at you; this time it was "George of the Jungle". I don't expect the makers of that comedy meant to make anyone cry, nor I imagine did they intend any deep message of someone being ripped from their jungle home to be thrown

into the horrors of the modern world: my own reception of the film that night wouldn't have made a very intelligent review.

Ned was waiting for me at Neiva bus station. We raced on strange energy through the empty, hot streets to be put up in the very simple shack of a school teacher friend. All Ned knew was that a local guerrilla girl had transmitted the order to him, that it came from the High Command of the FARC without explanation, that it was absolute, that I had been invited to speak to the local community in Rovira the next morning, that local friends were trying to find out more and that the order was **to leave Colombia**. I still felt completely calm, said we'd go and work in Bolivia and wasn't the heat ghastly in Neiva?

'Execution' of two more beloved Friends

But then Ned delivered another blow. When the Green Party started in Guayabal in 1994 there was a good strong group of people, some of whom have never been mentioned in these Green Letters. One particular friend of mine was called Rodrigo Sanchez and his wife Marlene. They had been exiled from El Pato several years ago through what I consider an absurd accusation that they had been implicated in an incident in early 1995 when the Colombian Army came in dressed as women and killed the local guerrilla commander; the guerrilla's medic killed himself rather than be captured. Rodrigo had recently set up a radio telephone for Guayabal and was accused by the FARC of alerting the Army and thus of causing these deaths. Rodrigo was a life-long left-wing militant and I find this unlikely in the extreme.

A few days before the news of our enforced abandonment of the area hit, Rodrigo and Marlene were shot dead, presumably by the FARC, in their home in another part of Caqueta. This news overshadowed for me our relatively small problem – mere exile and loss of 4 years' work.

We slept about three hours; my brain was too active for more. Then we took our last bus-ride to El Pato. My greatest fear on the way from Bogota had been that Fear, that endemic Colombian disease, would make everyone cut off from us, not speak, not dare to communicate. I was hugely, overwhelmingly, heart-warmingly wrong.

A Long Loving Goodbye

Our week-long leaving of El Pato was one of the most extraordinary waves of energy I have ever experienced. For five days our track was one long mule-train, our farm awash with people, helping hands and shocked, hushed conversations everywhere. In Rovira I spoke to our local community saying that as a life-long participant in radical politics, I understood that the mere fact of being labelled 'gringos' ('Yankees' - no distinction made for European) would be enough to raise hackles of suspicion in the revolutionary army and that we would of course comply with their order to leave; but that we went with good memories and a clean conscience, knowing that we stood firmly on the side of the people's movement in their fight for social justice. I said that we wanted all the forest we had saved to remain in the hands of the local action committee and that we prayed and trusted that the people would preserve it for their own benefit and that of future generations.

The leaders of the local junta were in bits about our leaving. So were the people of Chorreras. Everyone was rushing around, trying to get interviews with the local guerrilla commander to get more information, to get us more time, to change the outcome. Heriberto begged me to try and see the Commandante myself.

I made my excuses and sent Ned. I knew it was a waste of time and wanted only to go home for a long, last farewell to the farm and all our years of labour, to salvage what we could and organize what to do with all the animals and transplants.

Halfway up our track lives Alicia, my hugely plump neighbour; we always call in there, hot, thirsty and exhausted, for juice or an orange or coffee. We have always borrowed her mules and given her mounds of clothing in exchange; she started a beautiful flower garden and vegetable patch after being impressed with what we were doing. She greeted me with a smile as usual, I splashed my face with water and said, "I expect you have heard the news".

Alicia collapsed and crumpled in my arms, helpless with grief, sobbing on and on, unable to talk. I felt almost guilty, I was accepting our fate without any trouble, thinking only of where we would work next. But these people I had lived amongst were devastated. And what had we actually done? A few gifts, a few seeds, some chats and laughs and even some quarrels. I felt like an independent mother guiltily leaving my heartbroken children.

The next few days were a whirl of packing, political conversations, mules and more mules, distributing chickens and guineas-pigs, selling cows, giving away sewing machines and the sugar-cane press, a typewriter and a bath (a wonderful big bath we'd never had time to install, carried all the way up that punishing mountain track by Ned months ago), flower plants and clothes - but not the cat, the children insisted NOT THE CAT.

Roberto from Chorreras, Heriberto of the Rovira junta and Teodoro its president all ran up and down that track - all middle aged men and a little wide round the waist, up and down, organizing the whole community to send mules - no small task during a bean-harvest when every animal was needed for crop-carrying. "No, no. That can wait, these people have to be helped first" they argued.

We met many people for the first time - we didn't even know there were so many mules in the region. They organized for a huge school hall to be put at our disposal. Our children went down early to 'sit on' and guard the luggage, which quickly grew into an enormous mound. Becky, my grown-up daughter from Ireland, who had come to see the place and people we'd been working for for three years, never got to visit Chorreras or Guayabal and many key names she never met, like Camilo and Cliomedes. But she certainly saw the results of those 3 years! - 20 people in the kitchen just the first packing day.

On the final day of the notice we'd been given, 1st February, I travelled down the track alone, carrying nothing, saying goodbye to those beautiful gardens, the thick black compost, the endless beds of seedlings representing years of aching muscles and bones, the new cabins, Marc's unfinished hexagonal house, the flowering bushes and trees grown tall, the forest, the silent monkeys, the streams - and out to the burning sun. I had trodden on a nail during the days of packing so my progress down the mountain was very slow and I was beetroot red with heat and effort as I hobbled up the last slope from the river to the ugliness of Rovira.

A surprise awaited me: a huge group of Chorreras women, all waiting for me, smartly dressed, as I turned up sweaty and scruffy from the trek. They had hired a mini-bus and come to say their last goodbye.

We stayed three days in that Rovira school-house, the same place we had put on our first 'Green Theatre' in 1995. The visits didn't stop. Ned and Becky ran a communal kitchen, villagers brought firewood and more food; we already had a mountain of onions and other vegetables salvaged from our garden. We arranged with a local bus-driver, a friend who goes by the wonderful nick-name of 'Siete Mujeres' (Seven Women) to take us all the way to Pueblo Nuevo, the hamlet nearest to our farm settlement in Tolima, begun in 1988. We had had no alarmed messages from them and so assumed (rightly) that the FARC order to leave did not pertain to our Tolima base, which was a whole hot day's ride away and 'Siete Mujeres' couldn't do the trip for several days. We had obeyed the FARC order to leave our farm and were now (somewhat affluent) 'roadside refugees' and felt no danger – rather, we had an embarrassing zone of protection with the whole community protecting us. I wish they treated their own people in danger as well.

The old leader of Vista Hermosa and another member of the 'Junta' of that hamlet with whom I'd stayed after my brush with the cable bridge months ago, came for a long talk about what to do next - we had recently acquired for them detailed engineering plans worth 2 million pesos (approximately \$2,000) donated free by a sympathetic engineer. Our own Rovira junta were constantly in attendance, looking a little more jubilant - I think they'd been giving the local Commandante a bad time.

"Jenny" said Teodoro, taking me aside, "If we get this decision reversed in the future, will you come back?" I thought of all the work we would have done elsewhere, knew we wouldn't, and avoided a direct promise.

Wednesday morning and the bus arrived. The last sacks of clothes had been given away. More seeds had arrived from Neiva - results of a letter I wrote to an American organic gardening magazine which brought a very moving response from home gardeners all over North America - and these were passed on. A new leaflet I'd written, explaining our work in El Pato just before the blow fell, was gobbled up - people squabbling over who would get it photocopied and distributed. We held an evening of music and entertainment for a very sombre audience - our clowning around elicited no laughter that night.

A letter came from Anne in Bogotá saying that her top-level inquiries had yielded the information that the FARC were indeed ridding all Caquetá, Putumayo and Guaviare provinces of outsiders, Colombian and foreign. So we were able to confirm that our fate was nothing personal, though all local people kept mumbling that it was 'jealousy' on the part of the armed movement that made them remove us.

I had at last space for a few tears as waving hands bade us farewell from each shack we passed on our last journey from El Pato. In the open-sided bus, apart from ourselves, the children and one friend from Chorreras who insisted on coming with us, were a hen and nine chicks who protested loudly for the next 12 hours, two guinea fowl given to us at the last moment by Heriberto's wife, a large open box of guinea pigs who continued munching and mating throughout and noticed not a thing, and one completely hysterical cat, the subject of a piece of maternal authoritarianism; I gave it away at the first sizable settlement as it was suffering horribly. The children only sulked for a few hours.

A few days before I received the news in Bogotá I had a long session with a brilliant astrologer. I had asked, "What about our work in Colombia?"

"Very successful", he answered, and then looked at me strangely: "But you won't be there to see it." Oh, I thought, so it will be after my death. When he saw that I was taking this quite calmly he added, "In fact it

will be your going that will bring about the triumph." I pictured a moving funeral of an old English lady ... What I didn't know then was that it would all happen rather quickly and that I'd be at my own 'funeral'.

Aftermath

So what now? Well, what did we lose? - certainly not the forest, the most important of all, as there is absolutely no doubt about the fierceness of the Rovira junta in that regard: Heriberto in particular is passionately 'green'.

Our own farm? Yes, certainly - all that compost! And the building work and the loving care. I asked the Junta to put landless families there to continue using the gardens but they said the FARC had refused permission for anyone to go there. I trust that this piece of cussidness will soon be reversed.

Our green work? Well, I leave Camilo to answer this one: here is a translation of his letter to me as we were unable to meet before we went:

"All that remains is to thank you with all our heart for the help and teaching and friendship which will unite us forever. My own gratitude is enormous as you people taught me to love Nature, to live with Her and to show the children I teach that it is possible to save the Planet and that there are no national boundaries to developing these great ideals.

"A seed has been sown, it is very small but rest assured that it will not die: quite the contrary, it is going to grow and bear fruit, it will not be easy but we will do it. Our friendship will prove that nothing can get in the way of continuing to communicate with one another, of discussing environmental topics and other pressing matters with no fear in talking about them. *(he is referring to pressing for information from the FARC as to why we were banished)*

"There is a bitter taste left in this community (Chorreras) through not knowing the reasons for this situation that has arisen and all we know is that the greatest losers, apart from yourselves, are the communities you have been working with and the little schools.

"I promise you, Jenny, to keep going forward with all the plans we have made, like tree-planting in Chorreras, the 'Green Queen' competition in the schools and so on, to show that your Campaign has not left - it has germinated!"

So for now CRAC will have to stand for Colombian Rainforest Amazonia Campaign, and our address is now:

ATLANTIS ICONONZO TOLIMA COLOMBIA S. AMERICA

Visitors will have an easier time: less than an hour's pleasant walk through woodland, field and stream, no great inclines.

The Tolima Farm

The Tolima settlement, when we arrived after 3½ years' absence, was in a state of Grand Decay. In the fortnight we've been here since our Exile, there has been a flurry of activity: rebuilding, extending and improving the gardens and always wondering - what next? This is no grand virgin forest; here our 175 hectare settlement of streams, rocks and waterfalls, several shacks and a great deal of secondary forest

is an 'island' in the surrounding agricultural scenery. But what an island! I walked just a few yards - precious minutes stolen from feverish activity to get the place on its 'feet' - to sample what Nature had achieved in 3 years. I was astonished. Trees now soaring above my head, jungle taken over. Baby trees I planted 10 years ago now stand 30 feet tall. I saw once again that to destroy Nature, Man has to hack and rape and burn and wreck over and over again: for the minute you leave her to herself, she springs back powerfully in all her Beauty.

My first move has been to contact the environmental groups in Icononzo and former friends of 'green' consciousness. There is nowhere in the world that Nature does not need help. We will work here for a while and, if we feel ourselves limited, will move on to the forests of Bolivia.

I trust all our friends who have stayed with us over these three eventful years will follow us there, via these Green Letters?

My love and thanks to you all

Jenny James

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Local priest holds Mass to 'pray for rain'

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"The Forest Cries for you"

Offers flood in of Places to Settle Next

GREEN LETTER No. 25 from Icononzo, Colombia 18 April 1998

To all our friends who have followed this somewhat bizarre environmental campaign thus far:
Greetings from Tolima

Exactly two months have passed since I reported our enforced exit from Caquetá at the command of the revolutionary guerrilla army. Since then anyone who has followed news of Colombia in the press will have noticed why we were told to leave: there has been a tremendous intensification of the civil war there and presumably the FARC guerrilla command could not risk having somewhat unknown quantities (us) in their region.

As soon as we returned to our Tolima base (begun 10 years ago) we made contact with local peasant leaders and ascertained immediately that there is no corresponding order to remove us from this region so our gardening, building, seed-distribution and 'preaching by example' can continue in peace for now. Just before being thrown out of Caquetá, I had written a short letter to an American organic gardening magazine hardly expecting them even to print it. This sealed our fate, as far as any notions of 'retiring'

were concerned, as the extraordinary generosity of Canadian and American home gardeners has kept us drowning in seeds ever since - what we term in our community a 'message from the Cosmos' to carry on.

I contacted the head of the local banana producers union, told him of our work in Caquetá and of the 'problem' of the seeds and he came up from the hot country to our farm immediately, overwhelmed with gratitude:

"You have come just at the right moment," he said. "The 'Niño' phenomenon has caused terrible droughts, the banana crop is ruined, a new disease has destroyed the coffee crop and the people are just in the right frame of mind to see how reliance on mono-cultivation doesn't work. They know they must grow their own food at home - come and tell them how to grow vegetables and how to form organic compost."

Another nail in the coffin of my youthful dreams of becoming a ballet dancer or a President. I bowed to the forces of Destiny; I must teach Colombian peasants how to turn cow-poo into cabbages. I sighed bravely and Louise and I made our way down to the hotter lands where the people's reception at the 'banana crisis' meeting was warm and open.

Later I was visited by the Man from Umata. This is a government organisation that sends men around to the farms to teach people how to grow useful crops. He had the task of setting up 45 farms in our area in a few months and, of course, the government seed had not arrived. He gratefully took away a large quantity of 'cold country' (you'd be green with envy if you knew what 'cold' meant here!) seed, but carefully refused any cabbage seed as that had arrived. The ignorance of the man about how to grow the simplest vegetables was as great as his desire to learn. I think we have our work cut out.

Then I put a notice in Don Pedro's shop - our local store which sells nothing we would ever dream of buying. My notice invited local people to bring any of their surplus crops - fruit, plantains, yuca, things we don't grow - and receive vegetable seed in return. Such people always look around our already extensive gardens and view our rapid compost systems. We had always thought we were somehow 'cheating' - through our perfect temperature and humidity - producing compost within a fortnight when all the books say it takes months but now 'Organic Gardening', the American magazine mentioned above, has printed a brilliant booklet confirming such turnover is possible in colder climes - the secret is turning the heap every three days to 'cook' and oxygenate it.

A NEWCOMER'S ACCOUNT

John is a young Englishman who has recently joined us and has decided to stay. Here is what he says: "After living in a European city for 3 years I am only just getting used to living here after a few months. There are no distractions here. No TV, cinema, electricity, pubs, night-clubs. No passive diversions to take a person out of him/herself.

What there is, is Nature and human beings, and what we can create together to nourish ourselves. Music, dance, play, communication, food.

It takes a lot of work to live like this, not to make money - but to live. To grow food, to build shelters, to repair clothes, to gather firewood, to keep oneself and one's relationships healthy.

Through this work we are tapping into the true economy. Nature's economy. Here, deals are struck directly with the Earth with less need of that dubious concept - money. Vegetable waste to the chickens

and guinea pigs to make compost. Compost to the soil to improve it and grow food to eat. The surplus back to the Earth for her own use. In this economy EVERYONE benefits. Anyone can do this anywhere. It's not easy, it's so different from the way things are normally done. It takes Will, Spirit, Determination, Imagination and Co-operation. And it really badly needs to be done. Everywhere."

PRAYING FOR RAIN

One day our neighbour Antonino came round and invited us all to an open-air mass up near his farm. The local people had clubbed together to pay a priest to come and pray for rain. Having ascertained that the man was serious, we offered a Rain Dance instead and suggested a better idea might be to plant trees. Antonino thought we were ridiculous and, laughing good-humouredly, left confirmed in his suspicion that the gringos were indeed 'locos'.

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DIRTY AND DANGEROUS PRESS

Just before receiving news of our eviction from Caqueta in Bogotá in January, we received some other news: that we were **'gun-running for the guerrilla'**. This kind of fabricated rumour is an invitation for a death sentence, given the situation in Colombia. It came from a journalist called Tim Ross. I phoned him up immediately and invited him round to meet the people whose lives he was putting in danger - mainly children and a couple of women. He said. "Well, that was what I heard."

I happen to know his source: a right wing American journalist called Tom Quinn who used to write for 'Time' magazine and who managed to kill himself and his wife in a drunken driving accident in Bogotá and who had done his level best years ago to get us a similar death sentence (he also had not met us). So I was immediately able to quote Mr Ross his source and repeat the invitation to meet us. Surprise..... He did not turn up.

'The Forest Cries for You'

Our friends in Caquetá have continued to grieve: my neighbour Alicia wrote a movingly poetic letter in which she insisted the forest was "crying for us", it felt so lonely and abandoned without us. Roberto of Chorreras, who cannot write, sent a letter dictated to his step-daughter which said over and over again for two pages "we miss you, please don't forget us." And Heriberto, perhaps the most dedicated environmentalist in our little hamlet of Rovira, has religiously, conscientiously and regularly forwarded our mountains of post and seeds from America - a very expensive business indeed. One young man from Chorreras, Cristóbal, decided not to mourn, he came with us to Tolima, bringing his two very small sons and a young brother. Recently we sent him back into El Pato with a big parcel of suitable seed for our former neighbours, letters and money for Heriberto to keep sending our post and a request for NEWS.

Such friendships cannot be severed by a mere civil war.

THE FUTURE

Even while we dash around improving our food production, fighting against impoverished soils, making contact with neighbours, building wooden cabins, collapsing exhausted at the end of the day, we are always holding conversations with one another on the topic of what - or rather where - next?

There is no shortage of answers falling from Heaven.

Anne recently spent a month in Ecuador extracting my 14 year old daughter, Alice, from Colombian red-tape by sending her via Quito to Ireland (she was 3 when we left Ireland and wants to know her roots.)

While she was there Anne naturally informed our network of contacts of our new status as 'war refugees' and she was greeted with a shower of requests: at one point she was staying in a beautiful cloud-forest reserve in a hexagonal dome swarming with humming birds. The owner invited us to come and stay in his 'research station' and establish an organic garden.

Another friend who runs some thermal baths high in the mountains had the same idea. Fernando, whose family owns the biggest farm in Ecuador, wants us to go there and work in organic farming; Martha of the Centre for Research into Tropical Forests invited us to their reserve. It seems that after the huge damage wreaked by El Niño, which has closed coastal Ecuador off from the mountain settlements, people have become more aware of the need for self-sufficiency.

Then Anne found herself in the offices of the Mayor of Quito, doing his astrology chart which, as well as the opinion polls, confirms that he will be the next President of Ecuador. She gave him a copy of John Moon's excellent reprint of the "Green Letters" and he invited us to come and work in Ecuador when he takes office next May! But none of this is quite our style, is it?

Colombia reclaimed us: it is after all with her that we have our love, life and death affair. There is an Italian priest in Bogotá (it seems the church won't leave us atheists alone!) famous for his charitable work all over Colombia. He is in his 70's and has just had 175 peasant housing units built in the sparsely inhabited jungle province of Vichada in the north-east of Colombia (bordering Venezuela and Brazil). This settlement is destined for the 'desplazados' - the war refugees - of Bogotá, of which there are many thousands in every large town and more arriving daily in an attempt to flee the hideous massacres perpetrated by the paramilitary forces on the peasants living in guerrilla zones (it could happen to our own friends in Caquetá).

The priest has no-one to organise this settlement which he would like to set up as a model community. A mutual friend mentioned a group of Europeans he knows who have a lot of experience in this kind of thing and who have just lost their 'jobs' in Caquetá I am writing this in Bogotá where I am soon to meet him.

'Bye for now

Jenny James

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GREEN LETTER No. 26, 30th June 1998

Greetings Green Readers!

Anne has just returned from Bogota where she spoke with several government agencies regarding preservation of the forests we purchased and were forced to abandon in Caqueta by the guerrilla army. Reactions were very positive.

INCORA is the agency which gives title to land: evidently the man at their office found it very hard to believe what he was hearing: that we wanted to give the land for protection, not sell it. He kept asking how much we were asking for it. Finally the word 'donation' got through and he almost started a party in jubilation. He rang up his co-workers to tell them about these "wonderful people who want to give their forest". Reports Anne: "He kept repeating how glad he was that people like us live in Colombia and wanted to take me to see the boss of the whole agency." It remains to be seen how these agencies and the guerrilla sort out their differences but there is hope on the horizon as a new President of Colombia has just been elected. He is actually a right-winger but such is the people's desire for peace that he was forced to make real moves towards talks with the guerrilla in order to win the election.

Having ascertained that INCORA would definitely facilitate proper title to all the lands we purchased, Anne then went to the government department of National Parks. She explained our situation - that we are not allowed to return to Caqueta, but that we do not want our preservation work there wasted and want them to make 'our' forests part of the National Parque de los Picachos, which was right near the borders of our land.

Anne reports "They flurried around getting more and more people in to listen to my story and shaking my hand and saying 'Thank you for living in Colombia' and how heroic we are! I tried to explain that actually all we were doing was living the way we want to and there wasn't a hint of sacrifice involved, but the man was in love with his idea of these saintly foreigners out saving the Colombian countryside, so I gave up."

The people from the Parks Department have, so far, no trouble with the guerrilla so our hopes are fairly high that our work in Caqueta will not be wasted. If any of our readers are getting a headache trying to work out the relationship between the guerrilla forces and the Colombian government - please let us know if you come up with a solution!

A MULE LOAD OF MAGAZINES

So many generous North Americans had sent me back copies of the excellent magazine "Organic Gardening" that I was finding my bed-space severely restricted. So when Anne left for Bogota we sent a mule load of them ahead of her to the village to see if she could find English speaking organic gardeners in Bogota - an unlikely-sounding task for anyone but Anne. She went to the Ministry of Agriculture's 'Sustainable Agriculture' department and met the Director, a lady called Maria Teresa, who enthusiastically accepted Anne's offer of the magazines. "Are you sure they're not going to sit in a cellar like so much of the Ministry's literature?" said Anne, displaying pure Irish diplomacy. "Of course not!" said the lady, "we will go through them, pick out and translate the bits most relevant to Colombian farmers and make a booklet of it." The Director also promised us Colombian literature on organic farming in exchange, to give away to peasants with our seed donations.

Another donation of magazines went to the owner of the best health food shop in Bogota who is beginning his own organic garden in the hills outside Bogota. In exchange, he has offered to keep us in organic vegetables whenever we are in Bogota and to keep for us all his products which have passed their sell-by date. The third outlet for the magazines - and more seeds - is the high security political prisoners' jail in Medellin where the spokesman for the ELN - one of Colombia's guerrilla movements (it stands for National Liberation Army) - have an organic garden. This contact comes to us from Anne's new flatmate in Bogota, a Canadian woman who dedicates her life to working for human rights in Colombia. What is more, Joan, the Canadian woman, has asked us "could we take ex-prisoners on our farm?" She is attempting to start ecologically-sound small industries inside the prisons as Colombian prisoners have no work or study opportunities and the hideous overcrowding, riots and killings grow yearly. As part of her project she is trying to help ex-prisoners find work when they leave prison, outside their usual criminal environment.

Joan has also asked us would we shelter trade unionists whose lives are threatened by the right-wing paramilitaries who see them as fair game along with any other left-wing activists or human rights workers. Anne agreed immediately and met with Joan's partners in her organisation (the rest are Colombian) one of whom said to her: "The most incredible thing in all this is that you people exist."

GLUE SNIFFERS COME TO ATLANTIS

At the end of Green Letter 25, I mentioned the possibility of us transferring to the NE Colombian province of Vichada. After talking to people in the know and seeing a comprehensive selection of photographs of the project, we knew immediately that this was a Very Bad idea: the place is a desert, temperatures are beyond a European's boiling-point and some polite but uncharitable information was given us regarding the project manager, a priest. At the same time, it became obvious that voluntarily throwing away 10 years' excellent work on the Tolima farm to begin elsewhere brought our sanity into doubt. And so we accepted the plea of "Medicins du Monde", (Doctors of the World) a French charity, to take in some of the street girls they work with, and their babies. Within days, two tiny girls - who turned out to be in their twenties - and the 8 month old baby of one of them came to live with us. Anne gave them her pretty room in the garden.

The arrangement seemed idyllic. One of the Colombian doctors who heads the charity accompanied them down here and spent magical hours being shown around our gardens, buildings and woodland. He was

enchanted and begged to be allowed to come back again with his wife and children. The girls settled in immediately, helping well with the work, enjoying our food, watching our theatre, chatting to everyone.

Then, after three days they suddenly wanted to leave and gave no reason. We gave them their fare back to their street life. Then we discovered the damage: unmentionable deposits in my vegetable garden (though the toilet was only yards away) and a hideous smell in Anne's room that she couldn't identify. It was driving her crazy, then she found it: two squashed bags of glue, one under the mattress, the other under the floorboards. The girls had asked our children for it 'to mend their shoes'. Our kids knew no other use for glue and had innocently handed over the glue bottle. Thus endeth our first foray into the world of the 'poor' street people of Bogota. Another visitor's expensive jacket disappeared with them.

At 6.00 a.m. the morning these girls were leaving, the full moon was setting brightly in the sky. Anne overheard the girls in an animated discussion as to whether it was the sun or the moon. The advocate of the sun theory won.

This poem was sent to me by an American supporter who is an organic gardener.

Arboreal

If I could choose a being to be
It would be a tree I'd choose to be
For to sway for years alongside your mate
And watch your family grow to be great
Would be the grandest feeling of love
Always dancing together, no push or shove
For hundreds of years with outstretched arms
To love and nurture all Nature's charms
And to watch as your granddaddy grew older yet strong
And billow beneath him, feeling proud to belong -
Oh the wondrous life a tree can live
And one thing back to it I shall give
I resolve to respect the beautiful tree
For some day a part of it I will be.

By Angie Hawkinson, Minnesota, USA

Reading Recommendations

I am reading Vice President Al Gore's book "**Earth in the Balance**". The pathetic environmental record of his government notwithstanding, it really is an excellent book: I don't take at all well to scientific facts and figures, but this man has such a clear and compelling style that I am forced onward to understand intellectually all that I know instinctually. Not recommended for the environmentally depressed.

Not strictly environmental, but a brilliant, cutting expose of US policy abroad, "**What Uncle Sam Really Wants**" by Noam Chomsky, published by the Odonian Press, is a short clear path through US double-speak.

Magazines I admire: "**Green Line**" reports on ecological action: available from PO Box 5, Lostwithell, Kernow PL22 0YT; "**Corporate Watch**" does just that: Box E, 111 Magdalen Road, Oxford OX4 1RQ; and "**Skyeviews**" by a Quaker ecologist, Josephine Fox of 11 Ullinish by Struan, Isle of Skye IV56 8FD Scotland. Simply uplifting. Great work, Jo.

GREEN THEATRE REVIVAL

After our enforced exit from Caqueta, the Commune grandmother (me) hadn't felt a lot of enthusiasm for theatre work - especially in the 5 months since our return to Tolima, all my energy has gone on extending our gardens to 5 or 6 times their original size (and this will have to be doubled to feed us all properly). But the teen and pre-teen department took matters into their own hands, putting together a beautiful Colombian folk-dance, traditional for this time of year, which they presented at a local fiesta. The response was thunderous and overwhelmed the children. People said to them: "Even our own children don't know how to perform these dances and here you are, a bunch of gringos doing it!." They were immediately invited to other local schools to perform, which for me means a 'green light' to go ahead and offer our environmental message in artistic form as we did in Caqueta.

Then in Bogota, Anne met up with a friend of ours, Hector, who has written one of the most moving, intelligent and impassioned critiques of the impact of our use of the motor vehicle on human life that I have ever seen. Later this year Hector is organising a multi-national anti-motor-car theatre season, so it looks like I'd better start letting my imagination fly while I'm weeding the carrots. Incidentally, while 17 year old Louise was organising her dancing troupe at the local fiesta, a rather drunk man told her "the guerrilla were going to throw you out of this area too, but we told them what good people you are." We are checking this information with a sober source.

SPREADING THE SEED

Hardly a day passes now without local people turning up with produce to exchange for seeds, or without horseback journeys by our youngest members down to hotter climes to give away seed down there - and come back with bananas, papayas, lemons, avocados. Two local women are combining together to begin a vegetable garden - unusual initiative in this very 'nuclear' culture: we gave them a bumper bundle of seeds for this. The wife of a local community leader runs a pre-school group and has asked for visual materials from us; we have passed to her husband sackloads of useful environmental and organic farming literature for distribution to his communities. The area and quantities of seed we deal with here are much larger than in Caqueta, mainly thanks to the generosity of our new American supporters - I am beginning to appreciate what a huge and diverse country that is. I do worry about the lack of a direct forest/organic gardening connection in this area - there is no virgin forest left - but as (rather privileged) war refugees, we just work where we find ourselves. One seed at a time.

Our own nearly 400 acre woodland reserve is, of course, one swaying area of trees - many only ten years old, but high above our heads. As Andreas Graf of Germany who visited here said "Atlantis farm in Tolima is the most beautiful place I've ever seen." As drought strikes and local people visit, I think they get the message.

A quote from the Ditchling Quaker Meeting's magazine 'Inspirations':

"To impoverish the Earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age" *John Woolman 1772*

It does indeed.

I end with warm thanks to all my correspondents and with this ditty, composed in my head as I struggled up the hot, treeless incline in Caqueta one day:

Birds Lament (translated from Spanish)

In the time of the flood
I still managed to find
A tree to rest
As I flew.

But what will I do
As the clock ticks round
To the 2000th year
And the last tree hits the ground?

With love to you all

Jenny James

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Colombian Rainforest Campaign

GREEN LETTER No. 27, 24 August 1998

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I am always mistrustful of miracle stories but no-one finds it possible to believe this hardworking, deeply caring man, who involves himself in all our activities, ever led a dissolute life-style. Not long after joining us, he had a birthday and I said "Let's use this to give ourselves a real push on the theatre front." I leave Anne to tell the story:

Leo is the sign of the theatre, drama, showing off, and this last month we haven't stopped giving theatre shows, making up new plays, costumes, dances, songs and even building a huge lovely outdoor theatre whose natural backdrop is the forest. The younger lads levelled out an enormous semi-circle on the side of a hill, we made seats, curtains, dressing rooms and even a shaded area for the 'orchestra'. With all our 'green' and purely entertainment acts, our programme is now long enough for three afternoon performances.

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We had just a few days to get ready, running a self-sufficient organic farm and theatre company at the same time. As usual Jenny began her tricks of creating impossible projects on top of an already impossibly full time-table: like the morning before we presented our first public show in our home theatre to a local audience and still had to hang curtains and hadn't yet managed to do a full dress rehearsal, she persuaded me to go completely through the huge children's library we've collected over the past ten years to give books away. Then two days before going down to Icononzo she bullied me into making a huge ecological banner on fishing net (impossible to work with) in lettering made of donated gold braid (also impossible to work with). Then the evening before we went to Icononzo, just as I was sewing pink velvet roses on the banner instead of practising the new piece I was going to present, she got the rest of the group (who should have been practising their pieces) into a frenzy of cutting out letters while she made a 20 foot long banner that explained in Spanish poetry how each of the four elements was in harmony until abused by Man.

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The great day began by being woken before dawn by the hideous sounds of school brass bands practising. When we went to the town centre we were bowled over by the deafening noise of the sound system being shouted into by self-congratulating politicians, proud of constructing the barren new concrete 'park' that replaces a lovely old stone peasant market place. Then the folkloric dance groups began, very professional and played for by professional musicians. This made us all nervous. Our theatre is the opposite of slick professionalism. It is quite delicate, fragile, subtle, full of meaning and message.

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Then I put on all the rags and leaves and wigs and fringes I needed to hide behind to become the Madre Monte - the Old woman of the Woods, a Colombian mythical figure. We mixed this with the Irish legend of the Cailleach Bearach, the Old Woman of Beara who used to protect Nature in all her forms, including the baser instincts, and who threw herself into the Western Ocean when the oppression of Christianity took over. With that undying life-force that myths have, this cross-breed re-wrote itself into a comic green lecture on forest-felling via story-telling, movement and music.

The children also presented 'The Battle of the Forest', an exquisite tragedy with no words, just action, dance and music, well tested in Caquetá. And next day as I went shopping I was grabbed by the hand several times by complete strangers, local men and women who'd seen the show and who couldn't express their thanks enough for the beautiful 'message'. One old lady, sitting on the steps of her humble house, stopped me to say she hoped that the young people especially would listen to our message and then 'the world would be a different place'.

Back at our school camp, Jenny was visited by a teacher from Cunday, a busy market town in the neighbouring province, Cundinamarca, to ask us to perform in the schools there, and the lady owner of a private college in Melgar, a big holiday town in hot country, invited us to present our theatre at several events in a Cultural week in September. So Jenny's worries that the theatre would no longer be relevant outside of Caquetá had to be buried.

Back home, after a few hours' rest, we threw ourselves into spring-cleaning the garden and houses in preparation for the visit of 15 local women who wanted to learn about organic gardening and compost-making, and to see the 'green' part of our theatre work. On the appointed day, 30 ladies and their children arrived in the middle of a downpour. We persuaded them to accept dry clothes, gave them drinks, vegetarian food, leaflets on organic agriculture and compost making, books for their children, vast quantities of seeds, a tour of the gardens and composting systems, then squeezed them all indoors to view the theatre as our new open-air stage was too muddy.

Listening through the attentive, appreciative ears of these serious campesino women, each of us could 'hear' all our acts, poems, songs and messages anew, laden with even more meaning than they had been in Caquetá. We were astonished.

While all this was going on, our team of men worked in the kitchen - something local people have come to expect from our strange culture (their own men never cook). Ned and his helpers served up a three course vegetarian dinner. The local women were especially impressed with the soup and asked for the recipe. Ned explained that not one ingredient was bought, and that the main ingredient was boré, a huge local starchy tuber that grows wild here and which nowadays is looked down on as 'pigfood'. This information was received with amazement as he explained exactly when to pick it and how to cook it - an Englishman teaching campesino women how to cook indigenous food!

The ladies themselves had each brought gifts of oranges, plantains and coffee beans. They couldn't get enough of our brown bread and home-made guava jam, so we gave them three big jars of it to divide up amongst them.

We have set an unstoppable ball rolling, Since then, we have been asked to take our theatre down to the village an hour from here, and for two more delegations of gardening women to come up to visit.

GREEN MESSAGE FROM THE RED RANKS

A recent Revolutionary Armed Forces bulletin of four pages, devotes two of them to an 'Ecological Message', complete with a very sweet drawing of trees, river and wildlife. Here is a translation:

To all people of the east of Tolima we bring our message of preoccupation regarding the ecological imbalance which is threatening serious consequences for the future of humanity and our interest in helping to conserve the natural resources which still remain in this region.

It is imperative that the communities, headed by their chosen leaders, link themselves to this task so that they may play a decisive role in the control, vigilance and application of the norms established to this end. Equally, it is of great importance to educate our youth and our children regarding respect for and conservation of the natural environment, for the sake of a future which belongs to us all.

Gradually, positive results are being felt as the local populace complies with the directions we have previously established as regards the felling of trees and hunting: here the progress is significant, but lacking still is the concern regarding the protection of vegetation along waterways, contamination of water, burning, and the control of diseases and plagues.

We remain firm with regard to not allowing fishing with trawl nets, enclosures, poisons, explosives or other contaminating materials We reject, as any other crime, the attitudes of those who kill one species of fish in order to monopolise the lake with fish-nurseries of another

species. We insist that fishing committees should be set up to establish norms regarding quantity and quality of catches as well as to ensure the cleanliness and maintenance of the lake. We will continue to sanction with fines those who ignore what we have established, until such times as the committees are set up.

This is in the middle of an intensifying civil war. ...

ANNE'S MESSAGE TO THE NOT-SO-GREEN GOVERNMENT

Anne reports: Recently in Bogotá, I began to get annoyed at the ivory tower attitude of many governmental institutions that are supposedly concerned with the countryside and country people. The Ministry of Agriculture had no relevant booklets of interest and legibility for campesinos, only expensive, useless super-technical studies that involved lots of machines, money and chemicals; and the Ministry for the Environment had only a few good booklets. After a few days of trying to extract the impossible from them, first requesting nicely, then complaining and guilt-tripping and finally openly criticising their lack of organisation, I went off steaming to stay with some friends, Tomas and Adela, in the countryside near Bogotá.

These people have both worked closely with government projects, designing the tourist information centres and trails of the national parks. In one park, in Putumayo, they designed the trail so that it follows the story of special Tarot cards, each stopping place being shown by a wood carving, with one of the cards reflecting it, and an interpretation based on local Indian legends.

In the evening, by the fire (it's very high and cold where they live) I let off a bit of steam about the government departments, though I wasn't really sure of my reception as my hosts have built their beautiful ecological house on money earned from the organisations I was moaning about. So I was amazed and amused when Tomas began to expound his viewpoints: "Imagine," said he, "how awful it would be if all these govt. people were actually effective!" I was lost. "Look," he explained: "if they implemented their plans for bigger, better farms and more machines and chemicals!I sigh with relief at how inefficient they are."

Then he went on to share another 'secret' thought of dubious political correctness: "Although everyone moans about the campesinos going to the city and leaving the country, I think it's part of Gaia's plan to protect herself. I see the cities like cancer and boils, where all the poison is concentrated so as to protect the rest of the body....."

He went on to say that after being at top level with huge projects with enormous budgets, he now knew that the only way to be effective was to do as we're doing - choose a small area, live there, and concentrate on it. Change happens in small groups, not in big ones.

But in fairness to Colombian institutions, I came home with a few boxes of lovely books and a good semi-state organisation of coffee growers enthusiastically received some 'Organic Gardening' magazines and in return gave me a pile of booklets on how to make compost, which we give to local people when they receive seeds from us. I told this 'Federation of Coffee Growers' about our seed programme and they immediately began insisting that they wanted some to give to small-time growers who need to diversify now that the coffee disease 'broca' has hit the crops. "What!" I exclaimed, "but you've a huge organisation with funds. Why don't you have your own seeds?" They looked a bit embarrassed and said sometimes they did but the supply was a bit disorganised so I said OK, as long as they gave us lots of useful literature and posters.

"The speed with which we overcome what we have achieved is the precise measure of progress." (*Taken from 'Ventana Indiscreta' alternative Bogotá magazine*)

ANNE & THE PRESIDENT OF ECUADOR

Yes, she got it right: while in Ecuador, Anne did the astrological chart of Jamil Mahaud, now President of Ecuador. She had said at the time, "I won't even discuss whether or not you will be elected as it is so obvious from your chart that you will be. Instead we will talk of the dangers surrounding you afterwards." He obviously had enemies and the military could present a problem. Since then he won the election and there have been two attempts to instigate a military coup

BEATEN TO THE BEET

Back in Ireland, Mary Kelly went to Dublin with my daughter Alice to go on a Monsanto beetroot-pulling expedition with a group of eco-warriors, only to find that local farmers had got there first and had pulled up the lot themselves to counteract the Frankensteinian genetic-interference experiments.

PARKS DEPT. CIRCUMVENT OUR GUERRILLA BAN

So many were the seeds sent by our loyal supporter, Steve Thompson of Sheffield (and donated by Unwin's and Johnson's) and by American helpers, that we made up a huge parcel for our friends back in Caqueta. But how to get them there, now we are banned from the area? Simple (as it turned out) - the Government in the form of the National Parks Division took them for us and have happily agreed to be our postmen any time in the future.

QUESTION CORNER

Who will solve our problem of Beetle and Blight on Beans? We feel a bit silly showing ladies around and having to rush round just beforehand, guiltily ripping up all the pathetically lace-worked bean plants in order not to blemish the organic message.

JUNGLE CHILDREN

Report from our commune children when they went up to a local school to play football: the Colombian kids said, "Yes, let's play with the jungle children."

ARGOS is a Colombian organisation which encourages farmers to value their own ethnic agricultural methods without chemicals; they operate in the Magdalena Medio region in the north of Colombia. Here is a letter we received from their director after donating them seeds:

"We want to thank you for the vegetable seeds and the Organic Gardening magazines. These materials will be sent to the rural zones of the Yarigui Indians which cover San Vicente de Chucuri, El Carmen de Chucuri, Zapatoca, Betulia, Simacota, Santa Helena del Opón and Landazuri in Santander." Our turn to need a map.

BITTER IRONY

There had to be some bad news. Our friend Heriberto of Caqueta reports sadly that the rich black composted soil of the farm we were forced to abandon there is now being used to grow opium poppy.

We dare to end on this bad note since everything else feels so good.

With love to you all
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The great day began by being woken before dawn by the hideous sounds of school brass bands practising. When we went to the town centre we were bowled over by the deafening noise of the sound system being shouted into by self-congratulating politicians, proud of constructing the barren new concrete 'park' that replaces a lovely old stone peasant market place. Then the folkloric dance groups began, very professional and played for by professional musicians. This made us all nervous. Our theatre is the opposite of slick professionalism. It is quite delicate, fragile, subtle, full of meaning and message.

When our time came, Jenny introduced us quietly over the microphone, saying we are a group who work with the earth and that our theatre had begun as our own entertainment as we have no electricity on our farm. Her quietness contrasted with all the raucousness that had gone before and the audience went totally silent, entranced as Louise, 17, danced on as Fire, Katie, 13, as Air, Laura, 12, as Earth and Julie, 8, as Water. Then Tristan, 16, as the 'baddie' - Man.

Then I put on all the rags and leaves and wigs and fringes I needed to hide behind to become the Madre Monte - the Old woman of the Woods, a Colombian mythical figure. We mixed this with the Irish legend of the Cailleach Bearach, the Old Woman of Beara who used to protect Nature in all her forms, including the baser instincts, and who threw herself into the Western Ocean when the oppression of Christianity took over. With that undying life-force that myths have, this cross-breed re-wrote itself into a comic green lecture on forest-felling via story-telling, movement and music.

The children also presented 'The Battle of the Forest', an exquisite tragedy with no words, just action, dance and music, well tested in Caquetá. And next day as I went shopping I was grabbed by the hand several times by complete strangers, local men and women who'd seen the show and who couldn't express their thanks enough for the beautiful 'message'. One old lady, sitting on the steps of her humble house, stopped me to say she hoped that the young people especially would listen to our message and then 'the world would be a different place'.

Back at our school camp, Jenny was visited by a teacher from Cunday, a busy market town in the neighbouring province, Cundinamarca, to ask us to perform in the schools there, and the lady owner of a private college in Melgar, a big holiday town in hot country, invited us to present our theatre at several events in a Cultural week in September. So Jenny's worries that the theatre would no longer be relevant outside of Caquetá had to be buried.

Back home, after a few hours' rest, we threw ourselves into spring-cleaning the garden and houses in preparation for the visit of 15 local women who wanted to learn about organic gardening and compost-making, and to see the 'green' part of our theatre work. On the appointed day, 30 ladies and their children arrived in the middle of a downpour. We persuaded them to accept dry clothes, gave them drinks, vegetarian food, leaflets on organic agriculture and compost making, books for their children, vast quantities of seeds, a tour of

the gardens and composting systems, then squeezed them all indoors to view the theatre as our new open-air stage was too muddy.

Listening through the attentive, appreciative ears of these serious campesino women, each of us could 'hear' all our acts, poems, songs and messages anew, laden with even more meaning than they had been in Caquetá. We were astonished.

While all this was going on, our team of men worked in the kitchen - something local people have come to expect from our strange culture (their own men never cook). Ned and his helpers served up a three course vegetarian dinner. The local women were especially impressed with the soup and asked for the recipe. Ned explained that not one ingredient was bought, and that the main ingredient was boré, a huge local starchy tuber that grows wild here and which nowadays is looked down on as 'pigfood'. This information was received with amazement as he explained exactly when to pick it and how to cook it - an Englishman teaching campesino women how to cook indigenous food!

The ladies themselves had each brought gifts of oranges, plantains and coffee beans. They couldn't get enough of our brown bread and home-made guava jam, so we gave them three big jars of it to divide up amongst them.

We have set an unstoppable ball rolling, Since then, we have been asked to take our theatre down to the village an hour from here, and for two more delegations of gardening women to come up to visit.

GREEN MESSAGE FROM THE RED RANKS

A recent Revolutionary Armed Forces bulletin of four pages, devotes two of them to an 'Ecological Message', complete with a very sweet drawing of trees, river and wildlife. Here is a translation:

To all people of the east of Tolima we bring our message of preoccupation regarding the ecological imbalance which is threatening serious consequences for the future of humanity and our interest in helping to conserve the natural resources which still remain in this region.

It is imperative that the communities, headed by their chosen leaders, link themselves to this task so that they may play a decisive role in the control, vigilance and application of the norms established to this end. Equally, it is of great importance to educate our youth and our children regarding respect for and conservation of the natural environment, for the sake of a future which belongs to us all.

Gradually, positive results are being felt as the local populace complies with the directions we have previously established as regards the felling of trees and hunting: here the progress is significant, but lacking still is the concern regarding the protection of vegetation along waterways, contamination of water, burning, and the control of diseases and plagues.

We remain firm with regard to not allowing fishing with trawl nets, enclosures, poisons, explosives or other contaminating materials We reject, as any other crime, the attitudes of those who kill one species of fish in order to monopolise the lake with fish-nurseries of another species. We insist that fishing committees should be set up to establish norms regarding quantity and quality of catches as well as to ensure the cleanliness and maintenance of the lake. We will continue to sanction with fines those who ignore what we have established, until such times as the committees are set up.

This is in the middle of an intensifying civil war. ...

ANNE'S MESSAGE TO THE NOT-SO-GREEN GOVERNMENT

Anne reports: Recently in Bogotá, I began to get annoyed at the ivory tower attitude of many governmental institutions that are supposedly concerned with the countryside and country people. The Ministry of Agriculture had no relevant booklets of interest and legibility for campesinos, only expensive, useless super-technical studies that involved lots of machines, money and chemicals; and the Ministry for the Environment had only a few good booklets. After a few days of trying to extract the impossible from them, first requesting nicely, then complaining and guilt-tripping and finally openly criticising their lack of organisation, I went off steaming to stay with some friends, Tomas and Adela, in the countryside near Bogotá.

These people have both worked closely with government projects, designing the tourist information centres and trails of the national parks. In one park, in Putumayo, they designed the trail so that it follows the story of special Tarot cards, each stopping place being shown by a wood carving, with one of the cards reflecting it, and an interpretation based on local Indian legends.

In the evening, by the fire (it's very high and cold where they live) I let off a bit of steam about the government departments, though I wasn't really sure of my reception as my hosts have built their beautiful ecological house on money earned from the organisations I was moaning about. So I was amazed and amused when Tomas began to expound his viewpoints: "Imagine," said he, "how awful it would be if all these govt. people were actually effective!" I was lost. "Look," he explained: "if they implemented their plans for bigger, better farms and more machines and chemicals!I sigh with relief at how inefficient they are."

Then he went on to share another 'secret' thought of dubious political correctness: "Although everyone moans about the campesinos going to the city and leaving the country, I think it's part of Gaia's plan to protect herself. I see the cities like cancer and boils, where all the poison is concentrated so as to protect the rest of the body....."

He went on to say that after being at top level with huge projects with enormous budgets, he now knew that the only way to be effective was to do as we're doing - choose a small area, live there, and concentrate on it. Change happens in small groups, not in big ones.

But in fairness to Colombian institutions, I came home with a few boxes of lovely books and a good semi-state organisation of coffee growers enthusiastically received some 'Organic Gardening' magazines and in return gave me a pile of booklets on how to make compost, which we give to local people when they receive seeds from us. I told this 'Federation of Coffee Growers' about our seed programme and they immediately began insisting that they wanted some to give to small-time growers who need to diversify now that the coffee

disease 'broca' has hit the crops. "What!" I exclaimed, "but you've a huge organisation with funds. Why don't you have your own seeds?" They looked a bit embarrassed and said sometimes they did but the supply was a bit disorganised so I said OK, as long as they gave us lots of useful literature and posters.

"The speed with which we overcome what we have achieved is the precise measure of progress." (*Taken from 'Ventana Indiscreta' alternative Bogotá magazine*)

ANNE & THE PRESIDENT OF ECUADOR

Yes, she got it right: while in Ecuador, Anne did the astrological chart of Jamil Mahaud, now President of Ecuador. She had said at the time, "I won't even discuss whether or not you will be elected as it is so obvious from your chart that you will be. Instead we will talk of the dangers surrounding you afterwards." He obviously had enemies and the military could present a problem. Since then he won the election and there have been two attempts to instigate a military coup

BEATEN TO THE BEET

Back in Ireland, Mary Kelly went to Dublin with my daughter Alice to go on a Monsanto beetroot-pulling expedition with a group of eco-warriors, only to find that local farmers had got there first and had pulled up the lot themselves to counteract the Frankensteinian genetic-interference experiments.

PARKS DEPT. CIRCUMVENT OUR GUERRILLA BAN

So many were the seeds sent by our loyal supporter, Steve Thompson of Sheffield (and donated by Unwin's and Johnson's) and by American helpers, that we made up a huge parcel for our friends back in Caqueta. But how to get them there, now we are banned from the area? Simple (as it turned out) - the Government in the form of the National Parks Division took them for us and have happily agreed to be our postmen any time in the future.

QUESTION CORNER

Who will solve our problem of Beetle and Blight on Beans? We feel a bit silly showing ladies around and having to rush round just beforehand, guiltily ripping up all the pathetically lace-worked bean plants in order not to blemish the organic message.

JUNGLE CHILDREN

Report from our commune children when they went up to a local school to play football: the Colombian kids said, "Yes, let's play with the jungle children."

ARGOS is a Colombian organisation which encourages farmers to value their own ethnic agricultural methods without chemicals; they operate in the Magdalena Medio region in the north of Colombia. Here is a letter we received from their director after donating them seeds:

"We want to thank you for the vegetable seeds and the Organic Gardening magazines. These materials will be sent to the rural zones of the Yarigui Indians which cover San Vicente de Chucuri, El Carmen de Chucuri, Zapatoca, Betulia, Simacota, Santa Helena del Opón and Landazuri in Santander." Our turn to need a map.

BITTER IRONY

There had to be some bad news. Our friend Heriberto of Caqueta reports sadly that the rich black composted soil of the farm we were forced to abandon there is now being used to grow opium poppy.

We dare to end on this bad note since everything else feels so good.

With love to you all
Jenny James

Contents:

The Army camps on our farmland..

..and we camp in the local school

Imprisoned FARC friend saves us from exile

A colourful anti-car week in Bogota

Dancing circles round a police-woman

FARC commander in Caqueta who exiles us in jail

What Atlantis is Really about, by John Baker

Don't Let's Despair, by John Seymour

GREEN LETTER 29, Tolima, 7th December 1998

THE ARMY COMES TO STAY ON OUR FARM

“Good morning” said the heavily armed soldier in jungle camouflage uniform. I stumbled out of my cabin at first light. I live at the back of our communal rabbit-warren of a house, surrounded on three sides by trees. He wanted a drink of water.

We have become accustomed to reacting to such events as if they happen every day so as not to arouse alarm or suspicions. As the rest of his uncountable troop (between 50 and 100) milled around the place, appearing in the bushes as we went to the loo, and “guarding” us as we were weeding the garden, we simply adjusted to their presence as if nothing was happening. Actually nothing was. They were bored and we were quite a find in what was, for them, hostile territory.

On the second day they summoned me up to their camp in our new theatre-place. One of them began to interview me with almost forced hostility. I was embarrassed to note how quickly I had him eating out of my hand, though he held out longer than the younger soldiers who all gathered round, fascinated. Their commander joined in and, from then on, it was no more gardening. They kept us engaged all day showing them our photo albums and the children's paintings and discovering that they too had been thrown out of El Pato, Caquetá: these were the days of government talks with the guerrilla and a massive area had been cleared of all army presence.

A very old neighbour came rushing round to warn us ‘there were Army everywhere’. He swallowed his words quickly as he saw the company we were keeping that day and talked about vegetables instead. After we had answered their thousand and one questions, I was very bored: a visit from the guerrilla is always fascinating, I love talking politics, but even a mild question such as “Do you think the peace talks will succeed?” met with an exaggerated “No comment” from these army men as if I’d trodden on an official secret.

The young commander invited Anne to their base in Melgar to do all their astrology charts, an offer that will not be taken up: people in the countryside have been killed by the guerrilla for being seen at such places, with good reason. Then he asked me if he could come back and stay in our community. I said it would be a little difficult as this was a red zone. “Ah” he said “Delicado?” - ‘delicate’? I nodded and we both knew without mentioning it what the real balance of power is in the countryside in Colombia.

Anne comments: “These are the crack anti-guerrilla force of the Colombian Army, well equipped and paid, yet so low in morale and with no beliefs to fight for, that it is obvious why the FARC is winning.” They admitted to us that they knew nothing of our presence in the region and that finding us was a complete surprise to them. I said “Strange. In 1994 fifty of you were here questioning us.” “But that’s ages ago,” said the young commander, unwittingly revealing that Army intelligence doesn’t function very well.

Towards the end of their stay with us, we had to get very firm with them indeed. They kept insisting that we sell them chickens or guinea pigs to eat. A dozen times they sent representations to us. I closed the issue by offering my throat to them to cut rather than one of our chickens. Entirely perplexed, they gave up.

A poem from Jeremy Ward

Colombia, poor Colombia

. Locked in a two-step with the world's junkies,

Dancing in the pain

Of cocaine

Colombia,

The only place where the military

Faced with a hostage siege

Take away the escaped hostages

And shoot them

Colombia,

Where the mountainside, bared of trees

Destroys the roads.

Colombia,

Where the only law

Is provided by outlaws.

Colombia

Fuelled by white powder

And consumed by corruption

Colombia,

Where the Army

After a long day's murder

Puts up posters saying

“Colombia, we love you.”

Colombia the crazy

Colombia the sad

Colombia the psychopathic

Colombia the mad

Colombia the cruel

Colombia,

Full of love.

(PS the bit about the hostages refers to real events surrounding the taking of the Palace of Justice by the M19 guerrilla in the mid eighties where escaped hostages were subsequently 'disappeared' by the Army)

LOCAL SCHOOL INVADES OUR FARM..

On the last day of October, as the rainy season broke, the local school turned up to visit us without warning. We donated enough pencils for the whole school, seeds and organic compost booklets for their parents and put on an impromptu juggling show (thank you Andy). The teachers and local leaders who were with them asked us to perform our theatre for school closing on 6th November. We had just lost two important members of our troupe: Louise, who had left to go to Ireland 'to see where she came from' (she was 5 when we moved to the jungle) and to join the Trident Ploughshares demonstrations in Scotland; and Fin, our one-man orchestra, who periodically prefers the bars and streets of Bogota ... a perennial problem. We gulped and said "Yes." A frantic week of transferring Louise's acting and singing roles 'down the line' mainly to 13-year-old Katie, my youngest daughter. And the music to Anne and me, not the world's most competent musicians, to put it mildly.

AND WE GO TO LIVE IN THEIR SCHOOL FOR A WHILE..

The school of Pueblo Nuevo is several hundred feet higher than where we live, and sleeping on the concrete floor in the schoolroom with the broken windows, we shivered. The men of our commune many years ago had helped to lay the foundations of this little school, shifting rocks and earth and helping to lay this cold concrete. Now we danced and sang and acted and spoke to quite the most attentive, appreciative audience yet and discovered: no matter who leaves, our theatre lives.

Anne and I curled up afterwards in an agony of embarrassment at all the hideous mistakes we'd made in the music, but we were the only ones who noticed. The audience was entranced. After our second performance, the whole Junta (local action committee) came to ask us for further communal participation in the future: would we help raise funds for a village hall? We enthusiastically agreed - as long as we could help design the stage, being experts by now in how they should not be built.

"We are the destroyers," said the Junta leader, "but we thank you for your message." We went home warmed, forgetting the cold of that high, exposed place.

Another local man who had come to Anne for marriage counselling via her Tarot readings, told her that people round here support us and want us to stay because they 'have learned from us about caring for the environment'. He also said that, many years before our arrival, he had been paid to cut down some huge old trees on what is now our land. He cut one giant down and it splintered as it fell and was useless for blocks or planks. Since that day, he said, he had never cut another tree. "It took 15 minutes to destroy what had taken 300 years to grow."

A letter of recommendation from a FARC commander

At the end of Green Letter 28 I mentioned strange rumours of our having to leave here. We dealt with them rather simply - as simply as is possible in Colombia, that is. Anne made contact with a previous guerrilla commander of this region who had known us rather well. He is in prison in Bogota. He wrote a letter of recommendation which he and we caused to reach the necessary hands. "Anything we can do in exchange?" we asked. "Yes, well I don't like to ask, but I am cold here. Have you any blankets or a jumper?"

They were sent. His name has appeared on lists published in the national press of guerrilla soldiers whose release is demanded in exchange for Army men held by the FARC. Perhaps he will be home soon.

Nine-year-old Julie handed me this little poem one day. My translation does not convey the sweetness of her Spanish. She is Mary Kelly's child - Mary runs our centre in Ireland.

The forest is my Mother, my Life.

Without the forest, we could not live.

Water is purity and cleanliness;

The sky is as transparent as glass.

The sounds of Nature

Are like music to me ...

To Bogota for the anti-motor car rally

A year ago we promised an excellent political activist friend in Bogotá, Hector Arenas, that we would support him in a National Pro-Bicycle Week he was planning for the capital city, between 20th and 30th November. During the week previous to this, I painted four huge canvas banners full of anti-car, pro-bike slogans and pictures, made up 4 new city oriented songs and wrote a 'speech' for the conference. The 'speech' was called "Eco-Colombia" and was written as if after the Third World War for the Earth's resources about a Green Revolution that took place in a country in Latin America. For five pages I took my audience on a gentle, shocking trip to a new, green Colombia. The previously bad-tempered, very dry academic chairman from the National University grabbed me afterwards and said I'd made him cry. It was one of those moments that almost made breathing the poison fumes of Bogota worth while. Another was meeting and listening to a gentleman called Oliver Hatch from England, telling the exciting story of the victory of the National Cycling Policy in Britain: a brilliant revolutionary man, neatly disguised in suit and tie.

On Sundays in Bogotá, thanks to the rather eccentric ex-mayor of the city, Antanas Mockus, the central avenue becomes a bicycle, skate, pram and walking route for 15km. Along this route for two Sundays running, there appeared a crew on uni-cycles and feet, dressed as clowns and other strange creatures, drumming, displaying banners, setting up pro-bicycle chants, playing violin, singing songs and putting on juggling displays, the first Sunday in rain, the second in bright sunlight, the reception always heart-warming. Walking for many hours and needing to lift our spirits in the damp echoing streets in this strange new car-free freedom, Anne and I began chanting Red Indian chants in English at the top of our voices whilst drumming as we marched along. The strange magic of that incongruous moment – jungle chants amidst the concrete - sent shivers up our spines as we called out "We are the New People, We are the Old People, We are the Same people, Wiser than Before!"

A Colourful Brush with the 'Law'

On the second Sunday, we camped on a grassy verge outside the Ministry of Transport on the outskirts of Bogota, strung banners from trees and set up a roadside theatre lasting several hours. A large crowd of passing cyclists gathered round, there was a party atmosphere until, very quickly, there arrived on the scene a teenage girl in a helmet, a uniform and some badges, who decided she'd been put on Planet Earth to tell us we Couldn't and we Mustn't. Poor lass. She was faced with 50 years' worth of political direct action. I explained to her, somewhat firmly, that I was having difficulty in believing what my ears were telling me, I invited her to call the police and the

Army (she accepted the invitation) and I began theatrically to unbutton her blouse, declaring she had the wrong uniform on and needed to change her 'bicycle traffic' gear for army togs. The crowd loved it. The Jungle Lady, struggling to convert her violent instincts into acceptable theatre, thoroughly upstaged her, turning into a strangely dressed Hitler, goose-stepping up and down through the audience, ordering them all home and how dare they enjoy themselves?

The officious teenager called on her walkie-talkie for reinforcements and then the fun really began. A load more of our people turned up, mainly children, and I gave a running commentary at the top of my voice about troop movements in this new war; the crowd increased, 100 on our side and loudly showing it, the juggling and music continued, I suggested to the young lass she go home and make love as she seemed a little out of sorts; the Army and Police arrived and loved the show, our friend Hector liaised with them in his quiet way mentioning that the Image of these authorities was already dreadfully bad and how would it look in front of an international audience (the press had arrived) if they got heavy with a few peaceful cyclists and clowns on a Sunday afternoon; Jungle Woman continued her pseudo-police role warning the crowd against the 9 and 13-year-olds who were singing "Hello Sulphur Dioxide, Good Morning Carbon Monoxide" (adapted from a great anti-city song from the 60s musical 'Hair') and soon some of the bicycle people added their extremely civilised and heartfelt pleas on our behalf to the thoroughly amused Men in Uniform who stopped to watch the show.

On the long exhilarating walk home, Hector and Anne and I espied once again the teenage helmeted lass who had done so much to make a success of our demonstration. I walked up to her and thanked her profusely and invited her to come next time and even offered to pay for her services. "You were the perfect representation of what we are up against," I said to her. We waltzed away leaving one very confused Representative of Law and Order.

Anne reports that one lady who stayed throughout these events said goodbye to her with tears in her eyes saying few people would dare to do what we did, as Colombians are too fearful of the extreme injustice and violence of their own police.

Meanwhile, back on the farm, a visiting friend from Icononzo told us that while the Army were camping in our land the guerrilla moved into the town, called everyone for a meeting and talked of

the need to combat the wave of robberies and armed attacks being committed. Any criminals who didn't leave the area were to be killed: rough justice, but the townspeople heaved a sigh of relief.

FARC commander who exiled us is in prison

Regular readers may remember the account of the 'Bridge' of Vista Hermosa in El Pato - a 'bridge' that was a terrifying cable across a rushing river. The very old Head of the Junta of that community, with whom I keep in touch, has written us a beautiful letter, including these words:

“Our greatest hope is to be able to see you all again amongst us here in our communities. It could be that the peace talks will enable you to return and live amongst us. Every day we think of you and remember you with love ... Regarding your exile from the region, we asked a friend from another area to approach the guerrilla commander who gave you orders to leave, but it turns out he has been captured and is in prison....” (We are making a brave attempt not to gloat over this news)

In my reply to the Junta I sent photos of the children of Crofton Junior School, Yorkshire, in their classroom being shown photos of El Pato by Mary Kelly and my daughter Alice (15) who visited them; also photos of the Ditchling Quakers' CRAC exhibition in Sussex!

Other news from Caquetá is that Heriberto of Rovira reports that the National Park of Los Picacachos has now been extended to include the high virgin forest that Anne managed to work for and purchase when we were there. Phew! He also says he is trying to get support to stop the indiscriminate hunting of wildlife which has been taking place in other parts of the land we were forced to abandon. Some people continue to care.

What We're Really About – by John

A young man called John Baker of Reading, previously resident in Ireland, has lived and worked with us for a year. He is now returning to help Mary Kelly at the Irish end of CRAC. Here is his goodbye letter!

“Let me warn you now if you’re coming here looking for a nice right-on green campaign to join, forget it! I did, and did I get a shock!

This is not an easy place to live, these people really mean it. They are green fanatics. If you come from Europe, like me, you probably believe in democracy, tolerance and you probably think you’re broad-minded. None of that works out here. This community is aggressive, hard-working and terrifyingly direct. Expect to have all your comfortable prejudices exposed and left for dead. I did.

I’ve learnt to work hard and well here. I’ve discovered just how much goes into those nice organic carrots I used to buy from the health food shop with my dole money. I’ve been related to here on a much deeper level than I knew before. I couldn’t get away with mumbled platitudes to avoid conflict. I’ve been questioned and pushed until I have to admit that when I say ‘I don’t want any trouble’ I actually mean ‘I want to punch your face in.’

This community is dealing with the root cause of pollution and environmental destruction, the selfishness, violence and hatred that lies within most of the human race, it seems. Here we don’t run from or smooth over conflict, we seek to deal with it. We don’t try to pretend we’re full of love, peace and harmony; we aim to get to grips with our feelings of hate, violence and discord instead of blindly letting them out to pollute our environment and hurt our companions.

After a year here I've learned how difficult it is to really live, work and sleep with the same group of people and how I used to avoid this by flitting from one casual social contact to another whenever things became difficult, thus avoiding having to show or feel myself too much.

I've had to see that far from being the eco-conscious, amiable young man I used to portray myself as, I revel in destruction and violence, I couldn't care less about the planet or other people, especially women. Despite this, I can't help feeling a certain amount of pride that somehow or other I've managed to stay here and play a part in the amazing things that go on. Out of anger and sometimes barely functional human relationships, I've seen beautiful theatre and music produced, I've seen a garden grow to produce healthy, tasty food and I've seen a living environment created by and for the people and animals living in it. I've also seen kids growing up who are healthy, happy and alive. They live without education as I knew it but are capable of things I never was.

I'm frankly gob-smacked. I don't think this could work without some kind of willingness from the men and women here to face their inner pollution and deal with it. At times this feels horribly painful, at times it feels good. I can see the results and that's why I'm not going back to my old life, but to carry on working for this campaign in Europe."

John Baker

And from John Seymour, famous organic guru, resident in Ireland, we reprint, with loving thanks both to him and Earthwatch, Ireland's 'Green' newspaper, a small extract from his poem which appeared under the heading of "**DON'T LET'S DESPAIR**" ...

I walked along the seashore at the lowest tide
The beach to one side of me lonely and wide
The sea in retreat and retreating still
Then I saw a small wavelet surge into a rill
Come just an inch further than the wavelet before
And the next wave came further - another inch more.
The tide had turned - and this tide too will turn

Our Changing Campaign..

We want to thank Cynthia Dickinson and other CRAC supporters for sending \$1,000 (US) in funds to help us. As will have become obvious, it is not at present relevant or advisable to purchase more forest-land in the unstable war situation. Saving forest felt vital in Caquetá, there is a passionate response in all of us that makes us want to do that; but the long painful lessons of the Campaign have taught us what many must have known before us; that the less glamorous life-long job of 'green-consciousness raising' is at least equally important. War intervenes, governments fall, new generations are born - changing people's minds is a life-long task; never did we imagine that agonising over the felling of virgin forest would lead us to speaking in front of an international gathering in Bogota at a Bicycle Rally - but who are we to stop the waves? Anyone who has a grumble about the now far-flung activities of this Campaign and want their money back - please let us know and we will comply immediately.

Meanwhile we nervously and joyously await the next wave that hits us!

With love and enduring gratitude to you all,

Jenny James

PS Please everyone read "**Hidden Agendas**" by John Pilger, Vintage Press - a huge important paperback costing £9.

COLOMBIAN

RAINFOREST

CAMPAIGN

Contents:

A brave action by Chorreras Action Committee

Visits from Camilo of Caqueta, Hector of Bogota and Alice of the National University of Colombia

Religion? – a poem by Louise

First year review of progress since our Exile from Caqueta..

.. and Worries about FARC reactions to so many visitors

GREEN LETTER No. 30 from Icononzo, Tolima, Colombia

10th January 1999

Dear Friends and Helpers in Europe and America:

Ten days before Christmas, we received the unexpected visit of Camilo, the teacher from Chorreras in El Pato, with whom I'd worked so closely in Caqueta. He came with his wife and two children, saw new plays we'd invented, helped to make up and act in several more, visited our waterfalls and caves and spent many hours exchanging political news with us. I gave him all our remaining seed for the people of El Pato, paper and pencils and Nature pictures for his school, plus many other little gifts. We also donated him 100 U\$ dollars to help with a school tree-planting project and other work. He agreed to write regular dispatches from El Pato for these letters. Here is his first report :

"...'CorpoAmazonia' (the Government 'Environmental' organisation) is supposed to invigilate the preservation of Nature in the Amazon Basin. It is therefore shocking to note that after many months without seeing lorries laden with wood, suddenly we had a return to the noise of chainsaws, mules dragging blocks of wood and lorries loading it once more.

"The Action Committee of Chorreras summoned the young female official for CorpoAmazonia and asked for an explanation. She said that the wood that had been 'cut a long time ago' and was lying wasting was the only wood that was allowed out for commerce. So the Action Committee confiscated the wood and that started Big Trouble. The owners were livid. A meeting was called and it was claimed that the Guerrilla had given permission. The Action Committee investigated and the commander said no such permission had been given and Committee was in any case autonomous and could make its own that the Action decisions. Therefore the Junta of Chorreras prohibited completely the felling of trees in its jurisdiction, imposing a fine of confiscation of the wood and the chainsaw, plus a monetary payment.

"We then pursued our questioning of CorpoAmazonia as to why wood was still coming out of other districts; no satisfactory answers were forthcoming. However, we were extremely shocked to observe that on the farm belonging to said official of CorpoAmazonia, specifically around the water-sources of this property, forest had been cut down, thus endangering the water-supply of her neighbours."

This was a very brave action on the part of the Action Committee, very difficult socially in a tiny, close-knit community. People get killed for less, much less, in this turbulent country. I added my ha'porth by writing to CorpoAmazonia to enquire whether their name had been changed to '**Corporation for the Destruction of the Amazon**' as we observed for years in El Pato that their only function, apart from spending a lot of money on 'studies and surveys', was to hand out licences for tree felling.

Camilo also told me that Roberto, another close 'green' friend in Chorreras whose lifetime work had once been tree-felling, had stuck his neck out by refusing to burn his land before planting beans - the normal practice - as a demonstration that this is absolutely not necessary. This is an extremely touching gesture, as social ridicule is such a strong factor in these tiny hamlets. Meanwhile, Camilo kept to an agreement he

and I had made many moons ago to call his tree project by the name of Eduardo Rincon, our murdered Green Party councillor friend who began this campaign in 1994.

"Your life lies out before you, like a field of unbroken snow; be careful how you tread it, for every track will show."

(Taken from "Country", a Canadian magazine)

A visit from Hector Arenas

No sooner had Camilo gone off happily after his long visit, complete with all the recently composed 'green' songs recorded here for the first time on solar powered equipment (thank you Andy and Marc) to teach his children in Chorreras school, than we received another fascinating visit : this time from Hector Arenas, our radical lawyer friend who conceived the 'Pro-bicycle rally' we attended in Bogota. This man is so full of nation-wide and even international plans for our future work with him, including a grandiose scheme for an exchange programme of environmental projects with Cuba, that I was quite glad to take temporary refuge in cabbage-planting after his whirlwind two-day visit. Many of you may know that Cuba has been forced to 'go green' by the effects of the long-term American embargo on trade with them. The challenge now is to convert what the Cubans would see as a necessity into a positive philosophy and to get other countries to implement and appreciate the benefits of 'enforced greenness' (for example extensive bicycle-use and truly admirable city-gardening projects as in Cuba).

Hector is a brilliant and inspiring writer and since knowing us, sees the need in his own life for a 'place of retreat' and intends to build himself a cabin in our woods for periods of recuperation. This fits in with a long-term dream of my own, to gather together all manner of Eco-warriors who would have a base here to return to for revitalisation in between campaigns far afield.

Here is what Hector wrote to us after our Bogota-campaigning week:

"These have been short, hectic days, but in the middle of ever-changing circumstances, one thing has been constant : Atlantis, with its gusts of energy, creativity, art and joy and its quiet, efficient support in difficult moments to ensure things went well.

"This city of lonely crowds, of fear and aggression, has trembled with the fresh energy of mischievous spirits who understand that what is deep is simple. What remains is a profound sense of active gratitude and an iron decision to concentrate on this Green Revolution which has been initiated in such a subtle, firm way.

"The affection and gestures of friendship of each one of you arouse beautiful, sacred feelings.

With love, Hector Arenas"

For those of you interested in Astrology, Anne confirms that Hector's chart is deeply linked with ours on a long-term basis (conjunction of North Nodes is just one aspect). For me what this means is that the ever-widening circles of ripples emanating from the 'small stone' dropped in the forest-pool of Caqueta are now a fact of our lives, a destiny to which I now submit instead of worrying that we are not simply concentrating on saving (in Tolima non-existent) forest. Our title remains a problem - perhaps we should add an 'E' and it becomes 'CRACE - Campaign of Radical Action for the Colombian Environment'?!

Echoes of a Murdered Friend

Meanwhile, perusing the national press, a small news item leapt out at me: the name of the new Mayor of Milan, Caqueta. Long term readers of these Letters will remember Luis Arenas, the first of several murdered 'green' friends; and will also remember how the author of his assassination ended up in prison for another murder. But from information received from his widow and close family, I knew that several people were involved in his killing. Now another of those men - who in turn had made himself mayor - has been held by the FARC guerrilla force for many months pending investigation of mal-management of public funds. The night before Luis was killed, he had been elected by the local population as overseer of public spending, in recognition of his honesty, and this was obviously why he was slaughtered: the corrupt ruling clique did NOT want 'overseeing'. The wheel of Fate turns once more. Still heartbroken, I salute you, Luis.

My daughter Louise, now 17, has finally, using a Top Secret pair of trick scissors, managed to cut her way out of the red tape surrounding her immigration/exit from these parts in time to spend Xmas with our people in Ireland. This means she will delightedly visit all CRAC people who request it. Before going, she wrote one last poem, this time in English.

RELIGION?

If you asked me, do I have a religion?

My answer would be 'No';

But I must say

That I do pray

To lots of things, you know.

To the flowers that I grow,

To the river I hear flow,

To the seeds we gardeners sow,

And when I'm feeling right,

I even say 'goodnight'

To each star and to the moon glow.

Visit from an English Lady

Hector left, and immediately a lady called Alice Doldissen arrived, who in spite of her German surname (acquired through marriage) is as English as I am. She was the lady who really ran the Bogota bicycle conference, as Hector is a beautiful dreamer, but not always awake to the mere practical details life demands. He was terrified of me and Alice meeting - Alice the lady from the National University, and Jenny the strange barefoot woman from the woods. When he had to witness myself and Alice chattering intensively together for hours on end in Bogota, he had a mini-nervous breakdown, not

being able to understand English at that speed. I am hugely amused by my relationship with Alice, the sort of lady I'd never normally meet, in spite of our similar ages and both Londoners; the ease of our contact is summed up in one of my first ironic sentences to her here: "What on earth is an English-woman doing living in the wilds of Colombia...!?"

Alice's vivacity, brightness of mind and delightful cheek were a joy to have on our farm. As Anne said, another couple of days, and we'd have to retire and hand over the running of Atlantis to her. Here is an extract from the official letter of thanks from her and her colleagues at the National University of Colombia to us for our help at the Congress (which included, at her request, lovely vegetarian meals for all attending):

"Let us hope that one day in the not too distant future, thanks to the help you have all given us today and to our own organisational efforts, Colombia will be a country of cities one can travel through by bicycle... and in which one can live peacefully and ecologically. We hope to remain in contact with you and to be able to count on your support in the future."

Reviewing the year since our Exile

To review now, on this quiet wet morning the whirlwind that has been this first year since the guerrilla army demanded our removal from Caqueta: the most obvious change is the population explosion. In Caqueta, I rarely had more than 2 or 3 people helping on the farm. Now our poor gardens have been ravished by a locust-storm of between 25 and 40 people constantly, many of whom now live here permanently and the vast majority of whom are Colombian. There is no such thing as a day without visitors, and more than 6 at a time is nothing new. When 15 of us take off for a 'theatre season', there are as many at home, mainly Colombians, to ensure the good running of the farm. The guinea-pigs have responded likewise, increasing from a mere dozen to countless bundles of amusing fluff supplying us with mountains of much needed compost. The soils here are hideously infertile compared with Caqueta, and many an internal fit have I had to repress remembering what I could grow there and what refuses to grow here. But I could never complain of loneliness, isolation or lack of help: now I have to take

refuge in my own private little part of our large rabbit-warren of a settlement from too much contact, while Anne, on a long blessed leave from work in Bogota, takes on the onslaught of the front line.

Correspondence with America has been another outstanding feature of my life since my 'innocent' little letter in the magnificent magazine 'Organic Gardening' which has brought me wave after wave of fascinating friendships-by-post with a variety of people from that vast continent which would simply not be possible from our own little islands of England and Ireland: people from the extreme radical right to those engaged in radical living at the other end of the spectrum, yet all united by the knowledge that something is desperately wrong and the determination not to take it all lying down. I think I love those I am furthest from politically most, for the lessons in humanity they have taught me.

At which point I would like to include a 'private poem' sent to me by Angie Hawkinson, a young American mother with 6 children whose poem 'Arboreal' we printed in an earlier Green Letter.

Bare Feet and Fields

A Child once ran

Into a field full of flowers

She ran barefoot and free

And whiled away the hours.

She went running in circles

Or with wings like a plane
She marched with an umbrella
To keep out pretend rain
She leaped and she skipped
And pretended to skate
And raced with a grasshopper
She named 'Happy Kate';
She wiggled and giggled
And shivered and shook
Then stood for a while
Just to feel and to look
At how wonderful this was
In all that it yields -
These, together, forever -
Bare feet and fields.

Worries About Guerrilla Reactions to so many visitors...

Recently, my main contact in the local farmworkers union told me he had attended a meeting in our nearest market-town, Icononzo, at which a general plan was aired to

foment 'eco-tourism' in the whole area, with a view both to encouraging care for the countryside and to bringing in funds. In his polite way, he was asking 'could our farm be on the list of places to visit?' I think it already is! We did try to comply with a guerrilla ban on 'suspicious strangers' entering the region - Anne managed to stop several carloads of 'collar-and-tie' visitors and a TV team while she was still in Bogota, but who could stop the Christmas tide? So far, no repercussions, but I took the precaution of telling Rodrigo, a local friend, that if ever we are forced to leave the area, we want our land to stay as a Nature reserve forever. I was impressed by the extreme seriousness of his response. He reminds me of the quiet, dedicated attitude of our friend Heriberto in El Pato, who still faithfully, after a year, writes us the news from Rovira, sends on our post and fights the forest's battles.

SEED NEEDS & OTHERS

For the first time in a year, we have actually managed to run out of give-away seeds and even out of seed for our own very large gardens. Many helpers have found it quite unnecessary to spend any money (except postage) on seeds as so many get wasted by shops and companies at the end of each selling season. Most of all we need beetroot, cabbage and rhubarb, all of which we are forced to share with every ant-variety on the planet. One of the reasons I have time to write this today is that our garden is definitely dangerous for the barefoot worker: a heaving busy mass of red-ant activity. I snarl at the word 'biodiversity' on such days as I could name a species or two I'd happily live without (no, today, it doesn't include humans).

Other needs? Please dear friends from metal-producing countries - some sewing-machine needles and hand-sewing needles that don't break in two at first contact with cloth? That would be nice!

Our love and best wishes to you all,

till next letter,

Jenny James

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GREEN LETTER No. 31 from Icononzo, Tolima, Colombia

25th February 1999

A Friend of Anne's murdered by Paramilitaries

In front of me I have one of Amnesty International's calls for 'Urgent Action' requesting letters of protest to various Colombian officials about the murder of human rights worker, Julio Ernesto Gonzalez and his friend Everardo Puertas.

Recently when there were rumours circulating that the FARC might exile us from Tolima as they had done from Caqueta, and Anne busied herself making contact with the ex-commander of this region, now in prison, it was this same Ernesto who had helped us. His particular branch of human rights was to befriend political prisoners, so he was able to take messages, letters and gifts in and out of prison.

The night of his assassination by paramilitaries on a bus from Medellin to Bogota, Anne was preparing a room in her flat for him to stay, as he had on previous occasions. As she tucked in the sheets, the thought would not leave her, 'Ernesto will never arrive.'

Ernesto's 9 year-old son Pablo phoned Anne in a panic saying, 'Where's my dad, hasn't he arrived?' several hours before he was killed. Then at 11.30 that night, the boy woke up screaming to his mother: 'They've killed my father.' Ernesto died at 11.30 p.m. Next morning, Pablo got up crying and when his mother asked what was the matter, he said, 'How do you expect me to feel? I haven't got a father.' When the police phoned later with the news, Pablo simply said, 'See?' The day after the funeral, Pablo insisted on returning to school to confront any possible stigma that might come his way through having a left-wing father. He stood in front of his class mates and asked them not to feel sorry for him as he was very proud of his father and intended to carry on with his work when he grew up.

Ernesto was brought to Ibague, the capital of Tolima, to be buried. His parents wanted a religious funeral, but his wife refused, saying he would have hated it; so she had him buried to the music of a live 'serenata' band. Many FARC and ELN people (the two main Colombian guerrilla movements) attended. So did the police. Ernesto's wife walked up to the police and told them to go or she would not be responsible for their fate. They left.

The first night after Anne knew of Ernesto's death, she lay in bed unable to sleep, thinking of him and how he must feel about the violent end to his life. Suddenly, inexplicably, from within her small, airless room, a gust of wind blew open the heavy metal-framed window sending a mirror that was hung there crashing into the street below. 'Oh, that's how he feels,' she thought.

'The life given us by Nature is short; but the memory of a wellspent life is eternal.'

Paramilitary Scare in our area

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Towards the end of January, the paramilitary scare reached our part of Tolima. They had killed over 130 peasants in a few days just after the New Year in the North of Colombia and suddenly there were rumours they were coming to the villages near here and that a 'hit-list' with over 40 names was circulating. In Pueblo Nuevo, our nearest village, the people began sleeping out in the jungle. Paticuindi, a settlement two hours' walk from here, emptied entirely, the whole population simply fled. One of our young lads, Billy, began to attend local meetings in another near village and to join night-watch teams on the pathways. At home on the farm, we checked out a huge cave-system recently discovered, to see what parts would be suitable as hiding-places if local people needed refuge. I also wrote an angry letter to one of the national newspapers, an 'open letter to the paramilitaries', saying that if their object in killing peasants indiscriminately was to turn the whole population of rural Colombia into revolutionaries, they were doing very well. The letter was published.

Hunters on our Land

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In the middle of all this, while my grandson Tristan (16) was out one afternoon exploring the newly found cave system, he suddenly heard the heavy trampling of men in the jungle woodland very near him, shouting 'there he goes', followed by shots. Tristan flew home in a panic to tell us. But listening to his story, I knew immediately that the men were killers of a different kind - hunters. A perennial problem on our land. I painted some 'no hunting' notices for what it was worth and wrote to a local leader about the problem. He was completely supportive, said that the guerrilla had long ago banned hunting and that he would bring the subject up at local meetings.

'People are coming closer together, not only jammed into buses and subways, but also crowded in a psychological sense, almost to the point of constituting a single organism. The mark of the times is the network, a declaration of interdependence like a spiderweb: disturb it anywhere and it vibrates all over.'

John Pfeiffer (quoted in Organic Gardening Magazine)

A VISIT FROM CHORRERAS, CAQUETA

Suddenly, there he was: our beloved friend Roberto, the President of the Junta of Chorreras, on our balcony, wet with sweat from the journey and from tears at being here at last. All he could say was, 'It is beautiful here, Jenny, more beautiful than Caqueta.' Well, I couldn't agree with him (Colombian peasants see as 'beautiful' flatter, more cleared land), but what a joy to have him. He stayed and worked with us for a week, watched our theatre shows and talked deeply in his quiet way: of his pessimism about the present peace talks between Government and guerrilla army, of local fears in Caqueta of the paramilitaries entering and massacring peasants when the truce is over

(a very well-founded fear) and of local events in El Pato. He toyed with the idea of coming to live here with his family. We paid him for his work and journey as he has no resources whatever and he promised to return soon. The bonds between us are very deep.

... AND OF ALTERNATIVE DOCTORS FROM BOGOTA

The season of visits was certainly upon us and Alberto, a friend who works in Bogota as a healer (shiatsu, urinothrapy and many allied arts) came with a friend. After a week with us, he said he wanted to come and live here for a long time 'to learn how to live' as he had 'never seen such a happy group of people.' Little does he know (yet) how much fighting we have to do in our therapy groups behind the scenes to maintain such a good energetic atmosphere! He is due back in a few days' time with half a dozen doctor friends and a patient as he has hopes of persuading a group of them to set up a health centre here for alternative medicine.

'Revolutions don't always start with a bang. A seed is planted, an idea begins to take shape, and gradually people see that their life is being remoulded by irresistible revolutionary forces.' *J. Russell Smith*

THE EARTHQUAKE

You will all have read about the Colombian earthquake in Armenia and surrounding district and many people have contacted us worrying that it might be in our area. We certainly felt it. I jumped out of my seat as the subterranean Boom happened and my flimsy wooden wall shook. Other people came out of their rooms. 'God,' I said, 'I hope the epicentre of that wasn't near a populated area.' But it was. Later we heard that over 1,000 were dead and 4,000 injured.

A JUNGLE CHILD'S IMPRESSIONS OF EUROPE

Not strictly 'news from Colombia', but I cannot resist the temptation to give space to Louise's first reports from 'the outside world' after being brought up on islands, beaches, in caves (on our travels) and in the jungle, and of course in a close-knit tribe.

The first hint of what was in store for her came when she was in Quito, the capital of Ecuador:

'I was here in the flat and I looked out of the window and I saw a woman doing her washing with a very bored look on her face. I looked higher up to the next window and there was another woman in exactly the same position, and with the same expression. I looked up higher and there was another and another. I thought of how unhappy they looked and how much better they would feel if they were all working together like we do in the commune, instead of inside these square boxes, so close, but yet so isolated from each other. And then to my horror, I realized that I was in the same position, doing the washing, feeling alone. I stopped doing the washing and I promised myself that I would not take part, would not be part of the horrible way people live.'

On arrival in Ireland, she was shocked to the core physically by the cold, but also by a different kind of coldness.

On Christmas Day, she wrote:

'Nobody laughs or has fun; nobody smiles at you; and if you say 'hello' to someone on the street, they look shocked. In South America, you could make a close friend in 10 minutes. Here, it must take years. Here, people walk stiffly in straight lines to wherever they are going. Well, it is a relief not to be looked at as if I was descended from a UFO (like in Colombian villages!) but I do like to be acknowledged sometimes. Here people hardly see each other. And it is really weird to see a 'gringo' (*general word for northern foreigner*) tramp - it just doesn't look right!'

No sooner had Lou arrived in Ireland than she was talking on local radio about Colombia; and then when the US bombed Iraq, with Britain's cosy agreement, she and her sister Alice (15), Mary Kelly and John Baker who had recently returned from Colombia, set up a demonstration in the tiny town of Dungloe near our house in Donegal; they also collected hundreds of signatures on a protest petition. Here is Louise's report of activities she participated in:

26th Jan. 1999. Mary, John and I went to Dublin, to a drug centre, where we did a slide show and I talked to them about Colombia. I used your phrase, Jenny: The junkies are not only destroying themselves, but the rainforest too, and all its inhabitants. Then we did the Sleeping Beauty play (*in which she awakens in shock to a horrible New World*). We have added a lot to it, about genetically modified food and a big section about drugs. I think all the young people in the drug centre are a load of spoilt brats. They give them injections of something to replace heroin, and it goes on for years. I don't believe it gets them off it. They look drugged all the time. They are all on the dole and they have the drug centre to go to without paying a penny. I'm sorry, I don't feel very sympathetic. I'd rather help people who really need it.

After that, me and John went to Glen of the Downs (*scene of a woodland anti-road protest*). There was a meeting in a pub. Most of the people had hundreds of earrings in every possible and impossible place. It was not very nice to look at. Every single person in the meeting was smoking. I thought this was a meeting about the environment?? There were over 60 people there. There was one man on the stage, completely drunk, telling silly jokes. At one point, he asked for people from foreign countries. John said to me: Go and say you're from Colombia and talk about everything you want. I felt nervous, but I went up and said I'd been brought up in Colombia. He wasn't very nice, tried to hug me and make me part of his jokes and said ***** (*obscene sexual 'joke' deleted*). I pushed him away and said, Goodbye and thank you very much. John got pretty annoyed at this point and stood up and said, 'Do you want to hear about Colombia, or do you want to listen to this geezer?' Everyone shouted: 'Colombia! Colombia!'

The next thing, there on the stage was a heavy rock band and suddenly nobody could talk to each other. I had to put my hands on my ears. We left the room after the first song. After some time, a

man came to us and said they wanted me to come and talk about Colombia. So I did. I said, 'Hello everybody, my name is Louise, I'm 17 years old. I was born in Ireland but brought up in the rainforest in Colombia where we spend our lives campaigning for the forest. And coming out in the world is a very big change for me. Just now when that band was playing, I'm sorry, but I had to leave the room, I'm not used to so much noise.' At which point everyone clapped! I was amazed. I continued, 'I believe most of the people here are the ones who campaigned at Glen of the Downs. And I want to say that I am very grateful to you all, because I've been in one of the places where there is a reasonable amount of forest left and the rate at which it is being felled is scary, very scary. It is very important that we all get together and do things like what all of you have just done. I shall be in Ireland for almost a year and then I'll go back to my home in Colombia. And while I'm here, I'll help any campaigns like your one and also I'll be campaigning against nuclear weapons.' At which point they all clapped loud, and I said, 'Thank you.'

From then on, the meeting was nice, lots of people got up and did speeches and they placed soft music. It was about midnight and I was very tired, people kept coming up to me asking about our campaign. A very young girl got up to do a speech, she was crying while she said it, 'Here we are telling each other 'we've got to save trees', but we should be out there telling the working class people, the majority of the world.' That's about all she said, and as she came down, she was still crying. I went over to talk to her. She had already heard of us and had written to us. I invited her to come and stay with us whenever she wanted. I was a bit put off by the ring through her lip though.

At the end of this crazy meeting, we had to sleep up a tree. It was not much fun.

Two days later, Alice, John and me went hitching to a place called Skibbereen to a conference about genetic engineering. It was very boring. They were talking science, trying to find more reasons why it was bad to do genetic engineering. I had decided it was bad the first time I heard of it. So me and Alice went to the town hall where there were lots of small children doing artwork on the floor. We felt a bit silly, but we joined in. We drew tomatoes with fish tails sticking out of them and then wrote at the bottom: 'I'm vegetarian, but WHAT'S IN MY VEGETABLES?'

We arrive here, stay a while, then leave

Our lives are short, our impact lasting

Our steps are small, our footprints immense

Our knowledge is great, our wisdom lacking.

From the back of a card sent by a supporter, Davey Mulhern of Belfast

CLEAR CUT

I would like to recommend as excellent 'forest propaganda' a marvellous book by Bill Hunger called '**Clear Cut**'. It is a fast-moving novel, but feels oh so very real. Published 1996 by Hampton Roads Publishing Co. USA.

THANKS

In ending, I would like to thank Jo Fox for printing so much of our material in her ever-lovely island magazine '**Skyeviews**', and, as always, Steve Thompson of Sheffield for his constant seed-sendings. We are in the middle of a very long, very extreme rainy season and all your letters and contact are very much appreciated.

With love to you all, Jenny James

GREEN LETTER No. 32, 23rd March 1999

Icononzo, Tolima, Colombia.

Hello Dear Friends

Easter time eleven years ago. I lay in the fine margin between life and death in some prickly scrub on a hill in Venezuela just minutes from the Colombian frontier, whilst the Forces-that-be battled over whether Hepatitis or Colombia would claim my body. Church bells rang and choirs sang in a town beneath us and I felt strangely happy - an amusing end for an atheist, I thought.

But Colombia won, and as Easter approaches and I complete the reading of decades worth of 'Organic Gardening' magazines sent by hundreds of North American well-wishers, I find this beautiful poem written by Mary Makofske, who I'm sure will forgive me quoting her:

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Eleven Years

The neighbours think us mad. Foul-smelling
bottles line up in their sheds like grim
gestapo plotting to strong-arm the soil
and torment seeds into confessing harvests.

Light slides across our margin of the planet,
a day never long enough - our hands still
full of seeds, the new-made beds half empty.
Not superstition, but ambition roots us
here, where shadows rub our ankles
and the sky turns violet. We rake in
compost and wood ashes, plant and smooth
partly by feel, and come to know the garden
in a different light as one who's blind
can know the loved one's face by touch.
So routine graduates to ritual
even before the moon floods us in silver.
I can sink my arm up past the wrist
into a soil that once was cracked and baked.
Nightcrawlers now move through this earth.
and earth through them, and weeds and peas
and beans surface and grow and dive again
becoming a source from which they came.

Eleven years we've lived here. and built nothing
new except the dark soil sliding through
our hands. Except ourselves, who took this land
as something wounded we could heal, and be healed by.

THREE FOREIGN ENVIRONMENTALISTS MURDERED

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The 'execution' by the FARC guerrillas of three young environmentalists visiting the threatened UWA tribe in North Colombia - two of them from indigenous nations themselves, although all labelled 'North American', was a hideous shock to us. Days spent imagining the last terrible moments of their young lives, then the usual sickening hypocrisy of the Colombian press devoting pages and pages to this crime, whilst consigning the murder by paramilitaries of dozens of Colombian peasants weekly to a few lines; but worse still, the blow to our hope that even in the midst of a cruel war, the FARC might have some sense and decency and not equal all foreigners with the CIA. Although the FARC leadership immediately repudiated their own commander responsible for the deaths, this was not much use to those young idealists or the people who loved them.

The response of the mother of one of the dead Americans was extraordinary: she said she 'didn't want her personal tragedy to become the tragedy of a whole nation' - that is, she didn't want the peace talks between guerrilla and government to end because of her son's death.

THE FARC'S DEMANDS

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It seems fitting at this point to say why, in spite of the FARC's shoddy treatment of ourselves, we continue in general to favour them over other Colombian options, whilst deploring actions such as executing peasants for being 'on the other side'. They are very much a peasant army and whilst they do have an urban programme, it is the countryside that concerns us.

Here are some of-their demands:

- Preservation of what is left of Colombian forests and woodlands.
- Redistribution of land ownership which entails break-up of the massive environmentally destructive cattle-ranches and drug plantations (hence the birth of the 'paramilitaries' in defence of vested interests).
- Government-assisted substitution of food crops for drug crops.
- Opposition to US-financed aerial fumigation of-cocoa and poppy crops.
- State guarantees for the physical survival of a legal left-wing opposition. The last left-wing party that set up - the UP (Union Patriotica) has suffered the assassination of over 3,000 of its members. Imagine that happening to a European Green Party and you'll feel the gulf between what you think of as 'democracy' and what the Colombian government says is 'democracy' ..
- An end to the Colombian Government's acceptance of dictation from the US as to its every breath and move. (political slogans of 'US interventionism' become very real when one reads the daily 'liberal press'. It makes one cringe to note the Government's unapologetic subservience to every word that issues out of the mouth of the Northern Lord) .
- And treatment of the peasant population as if they were part of Colombia and not 'The Enemy' - i.e. social justice. Colombian urban middle-class snobbery towards the countryside has to be smelt to be believed!

Of course none of this justifies killing three people supporting the UWA Indians, but it does show why, politically, we lean towards the FARC. Meanwhile, we have our own points of difficulty: we are evidently due for a visit from them to enquire 'Where do we get our money from?' (what

money?!) and 'in exchange for what?' (i.e. the age-old 'spying' fears). It may be a little difficult to explain that our money comes from the Stars, but if Anne is around at the time, maybe a couple of Guerrilla horoscopes will convince them ... I also owe them an answer to the deeply hurtful comment that we 'produce nothing' - they mean for commercial purposes. I will proudly show them that we produce lots - but we eat it !

Talking of which, I would like to list our..

SEED NEEDS

In spite of a disheartening rainy season, we have kept extending and extending again our area under cultivation. As most seed packets are destined for suburban gardens of a few square yards, we have once again run out of seeds. These are some of the varieties we'd love, though all will be used: Arugula (rocket salad), huckleberry, strawberry and cape gooseberry, rhubarb, comfrey, lavender, lupins and other flowers, thyme, rosemary, basil, celery and celeriac, onions (all sorts) and leeks, carrot, cabbage and parsnip.

Gardening is an active participation in the deepest mysteries of the universe. By gardening, our children learn that they constitute with all growing things a single community of life. They learn to nurture and be nurtured in a universe that is always precarious but ultimately benign. *Thomas Berry*

GOOD NEWS

We have just heard that UMATA, a Government agricultural agency is going to purchase an area of land adjacent to ours to allow it to return to forest! We've come a long way in 10 years from the day when neighbours complained 'we were buying to waste it by letting it return to jungle and that the bears would come back'. Now our wonderful waving sea of woodland is to be added to by the Government!

In wildness is the preservation of the world. Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest.

Henry David Thoreau

HUNTING THE HUNTERS

The local leader who supports us entirely in our opposition to hunting (and who reminds us that it is totally banned by the FARC) came the other day to say 'could we please catch the hunters to identify them'...

MEDELLIN CONNECTIONS

I have an excellent penfriend of many years' standing who is the president of Medellin Ornithology Society and who prints our material from time to time. I sent him a copy of one of the excellent organic farming leaflets we distribute, which is produced by a Government agency. He wrote back and said, 'Fine. But please send me pictures of your gardens, and your methods and experiences and I'll publish them - then the people will really believe it'. So I did.

A small 14-year-old boy arrived here the other day, having walked from Melgar (about 6-7 hours uphill on shadeless roads). He had come from Medellin. He said that someone had told him there were some farming gringos here who would let you stay with them He'd been told in Manizales, which is the other side of the Central Sierra (we are on the Eastern Sierra)!

NEWS OF OUR PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND

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Our own children meanwhile, have all disappeared for over a fortnight now, to explore and work on another ecological project near the hotter town of Fusagasuga, run by a long-term Colombian friend of ours. Their work, company and music are sorely missed.

The European branch of our brood have their news too: Alice is studying art (or rather, teaching it) and receiving other basic education in a school for gypsies in Cork. Well, she's certainly a 'traveller'! Louise and Martyn, both 17, have recently been arrested with Mary Kelly at Faslane nuclear weapons base in Scotland.

Mary has some fascinating titbits to tell: she reports that during the demonstration, the female leader was in touch by mobile phone with the head of the police and that he asked how many Vegan dinners he should be ordering for the holding cells even before anyone was arrested! They also kept in touch to report how many new arrests had been made, the officer making comments like, '9 more arrested - brilliant - the numbers are up to 40 now'. Jane, the demonstration leader, invited the man to join in. He replied, 'Half the force would have joined the blockade if they were allowed'.

Irish Mary noted one of the policemen was Irish too - and that he was very good-looking. She told him he was wasted in the force and should be in films. He couldn't help grinning and later when Louise was upset and crying after being arrested, he gave her an organic oat crunchy bar to comfort her. An ex-nun (in the Order for 30 years) and her 60+ activist partner were arrested wearing Tony Blair and Clinton masks - Clinton had Blair on a huge dog-collar lead.

In prison, Mary reports: 'We were given apples, dried fruit and nuts, baked potatoes and beans, and the duty sergeant came around several times to see if we were alright. 'Hey, what's happened'? I asked one of the surly wardresses, uncomfortable in her new role of giving concessions. 'Why are we getting 5-star treatment?' 'Because you lot are always complaining,' says she grudgingly'. Other prisoners take note!

For no generation of living men can bind a generation that is yet unborn or can sell or squander the rights of man. Each generation of man has but a life interest in the world.

Finton Lalor (Irish Republican)

“Move Your Garden Up the Hill”

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Meanwhile back on the farm ... the Presidents of two local Juntas came visiting to see what we do and to receive gifts of writing paper for their local schools, the remains of our giveaway seeds, organic farming literature, composting systems, plus the regulation tour of our gardens and park – yes, we have begun a flower, shrub and fruit-tree 'park', where there used to be only compacted red clay and soggy bog. One of them was accompanied by the man who sold us this farm and who had not looked at it for several years. One noted a certain sourness about him. Eleven years ago he sold an ‘obviously’ useless extension of infertile mountain sand and scrub to a pleasant but obviously ridiculous European female (who was doing her evil best to hide the glint of glee in her eye as she thought, 'You wait and see what we'll do with this, mate') ... Now, viewing the hundreds of fertile terraced vegetable beds, he had the cheek to say to me, 'Jenny you should move this garden up the hill. It's more fertile up there.' I gave him what I hoped was a withering look.

STRANGE POST

A Green Campaign leads one into strange waters. From the American Religious Right, I receive an unsolicited publication warning of the evils of environmentalism. In it is an advert for a new book called 'The Sustainable Prince' with a picture of poor Prince Charles on the cover (and I am no royalist). The blurb boasts. 'Documents the Prince's sordid connections with the environmental elite'!?

CLAUDIO *(pronounced 'cloud-ee-o')*

Who is Claudio? He is one of Anne's closest friends, clients and helpers in Bogota. He is also an architect, the son of an ex Minister of Justice. He went to school with Pastrana (the new Colombian President), is a friend of the 'First Lady' and his father was a friend of Pastrana's father, who was also a President of Colombia ... if you see what I mean.

I know Claudio. He is a huge-hearted visionary; he weeps when I read him '**Eco-Colombia**' the green future fantasy I wrote about Colombia as a possible 'green nation'. He helps us non-stop. It is he who lends us his lorry and his driver, to bring a wealth of school books, clothes, furniture, even a dismantlable wooden house, donated to us by a musical group, to this area. He paid Mary's fare to Ireland just because he loves what we are doing. He is also bankrupt! But his gifts flow: he has

now donated us a computer and printer. 'What on earth am I going to do with that?' I naturally enquired as it doesn't run off a solar panel. 'Set it up in Icononzo at a friend's house', was Anne's reply. I still haven't found out what it does, but I'm keeping an open mind.

Well, Claudio has just become one of the official signatories of our 'Fundacion Atlantis' and in his debonair way (which I appreciate) has, without asking us, presented a massive and impressive document to the President of Colombia, concerning the setting up all over Colombia of new self-sufficient settlements to solve the 'desplazado' (displaced persons) problem - that is, the millions of internal refugees clinging to the edges of Colombia's towns, having fled from rural violence and war. He announced that we will be in charge of the agricultural side of these projects! When Anne and I said something like 'EEK! Help! How many people do you think we are?' he calmed us by assuring us that new community leaders would come here to be trained in our lifestyle and ecological methods.

We don't believe him, but it was a nice diplomatic try. Last news from Anne was that as she was busy looking at Claudio's astro-chart and declaiming: 'It looks like the Government is going to accept your project', the phone rang. You guessed: Claudio is to go and meet with the President who is very interested. Eeek, Help!

Love to Everyone, Jenny James.

”The climate sure has changed. Imagine, 30 years of clobbering and now I have become respectable.” *Quote from J.I.Rodale of America's Organic Gardening pioneer organisation.*

COLOMBIAN RAINFOREST CAMPAIGN

Contents:

Grand Cross in the heavens A brief guerrilla kidnap

‘Guardian’ newspaper says we are in danger

Revolutionary Therapy

Explosion of ‘green’ interest all round

Wise words from young Louise in Europe

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GREEN LETTER No. 33 from Icononzo, Tolima

4th May 1999

Dear Friends Abroad - Greetings!

We have often mentioned in these Letters our main source of income for living and for our all Green projects: our colleague Anne of Donegal, Ireland, does astrology charts for all and sundry in the Bog as we call Colombia's capital cesspit, Bogotá. Any of you who are interested in Astrology will probably know that this is a very special year with a very menacing Grand Cross appearing in the heavens in mid-summer. I want to open this Letter with Anne's introductory comments to a study she (like all astrologers, I'm sure) has been making of this phenomenon.

"Looking at the dramatic Grand Cross of August 1999 from the point of view of Colombia, the overall picture is one of huge opportunity through conflict. I think we need to look at this window of opportunity in the sky in a very personal fashion, not as something out there or as forces beyond our control such as destiny, planets or multinationals. In its highest form of expression, this time gives us the power to improve the desperate state of the present management of our planet by each person finding their own individual, colourful, creative, joyful, self-expressive, theatrical, autonomous way of joining up with other people who're working for the planet and for a human society. Leo energy (there is a New Moon eclipse in Leo) at its best is as unarguable-with as the Sun and this time is a challenge for each of us to be so true to our inner Suns that the planet becomes peopled by millions of points of light that the powers of destruction can't argue with!"

"I would feel more optimistic about a bright future for man if he spent less time proving that he can outwit Nature and more time tasting her sweetness and respecting her seniority."

E.B.White

A BRIEF GUERRILLA KIDNAP

Last year, after a Green Theatre show near here, a man begged us to take his teenage daughter to live with us to share our 'culture' and she has been with us ever since, and so, for a lot of the time, has he. But recently he went down to the lower reaches of Caquetá and was kidnapped by the FARC guerrilla army, as he was unknown in that area.

He was taken off a bus by guerrilla soldiers making sure no paramilitaries entered the area. They took him to a farm not far from a village and held him there for 8 days, interrogating him to make sure his story held water. He reports he never felt fear as he had a clear conscience. He suggested they check out his

identity with the people he was about to visit. They did this and eventually released him. We asked him about their treatment of him, and what he did during his time with them. 'They were never aggressive', he said. He worked with a team of them getting firewood and going on mule trips for provisions. They fed him well. There were about 20 of them, from teenage boys and girls to University students who'd left their studies to join the struggle; they lived in a permanent camp of wooden houses. Their social organisation is strict: they kill spies and they take criminals away to work, sending money to the wife. (People taken away by, the paramilitaries never return, though their bodies sometimes do.)

In the Tolima region, the guerrilla force produces a small handout called '**Resistencia**' regularly for the peasants, suggesting ways to keep the area safe and laying down 'bye-laws' of conduct, including the environmental laws I have listed in previous Green letters. In the latest bulletin, these items appear:

"The distribution and sale of marihuana, bazuco and other narcotic substances is prohibited in all establishments. It is also prohibited to sell to minors alcoholic drinks and cigarettes."

APRIL FOOL'S DAY NONSENSE IN 'THE GUARDIAN'

We wish to apologise to any of our friends and supporters who got alarmed by the heading on April 1st in The Guardian: 'Colombian Death Squads Threaten the New Atlantis' by Jeremy Lennard (nice pictures though!). This is well-meaning nonsense. We have kept Jeremy Lennard regularly informed of all goings-on here and of course mentioned that the peasants in this area, as anywhere else in a 'red zone' (guerrilla territory), are always scared for their lives as the 'paras' consider them a military objective. But the danger we face in this sense is meaningless compared to that of a Colombian peasant. It seems even the best of newspapers churn out mangled news.

A GREEN BUS?

Last Letter we introduced you to our friend Claudio. He has now said that if he lands the enormous architectural contract he is seeking, he will buy us a bus! That means a 'chiva' - one of the open-sided country buses that have never seen a paved road and have flat tops to carry people and huge quantities of luggage. This generosity comes about as he has long had plans for us to become mobile and go all over Colombia on 'Green' and associated projects. For several years, he has been planning and preparing an enormous self-sufficient, ecological

housing project. He also went bankrupt attempting a one-man reform of the inhumane prison system in Colombia by designing open prisons.

The Colombian President, Pastrana, has said he likes Claudio's settlement project for internal refugees and has passed it on to the Government department concerned.

STRANGE CIRCLES

Meanwhile, Life continues to play its little games with us. For 25 years we were chiefly known as a therapeutic Community. Then we came to Colombia, and I put all that behind me - so I thought - to concentrate on the more pressing Green issues. So imagine the state of my lower jaw when Anne came home to tell me that a lady called Constanza Ardile who gives therapy in large groups to refugees, paramilitaries and police wants us to work with her. She trains peasant therapists and 'community mothers' to give therapy in their districts. She has trained around 600 of these. She also carried out an initial programme with 30 police and has been given a contract to work with several hundred of them. She recounts that the Police Chief didn't even look at the programme she was offering and just waved 'Yes, yes, of course - good for public relations' without realising he had just given permission for a Revolution in the police-force. Constanza wants us to work giving therapy and doing theatre in Apartadó - a paramilitary stronghold in the North - and Bogotá (on second thoughts, perhaps the 'Guardian' is psychic...). Her last therapists used to be overcome with nausea and vomiting on leaving sessions, having heard the confessions of police who had tortured and murdered.

A further piece of information from this amazing lady has us incensed and we intend to act on it and report further later: that an English woman representing a Fund that was helping this work turned up at a therapy session, got entirely freaked out by the crying and screaming and convinced her organization to withdraw all funding. What precisely would she expect people living through the Colombian nightmare to be doing in a therapy group?

Here I think a brilliant quote sent by Meredith, a friend in Ecuador, is apt:

"We are confronted by insurmountable opportunities!"

A FRIENDLY INVASION

Some weeks ago, Anne came panting up the pathway saying, 'I've come to warn you - I've brought 14 people with me from Bogotá.' I spent a few minutes swearing, then rose to the occasion. It was a magnificent visit. They were all professional people - civil engineers, doctors of alternative medicine, a dentist, a yoga teacher, a biologist, dancers and artists - and all belonged to one group headed by an old friend of ours, Alberto, a healer, who now lives here and wants to set up an alternative healing centre. Hence his successful canvassing of a visit from 14 friends! It was an explosion of culture, days of theatre and exchange of skills. And if the war situation allows us to stay here, the Centre will become a reality.

Only one small problem - my poor little brain. Alberto and all his friends are urine-therapy fanatics (you will have read about it elsewhere, I refuse to explain this to you!) and every unsuspecting peasant who comes up the pathway is donated a long explanatory lecture on the subject. Ye gods! And just when I'm managing to close my strait-jacketed mind to the matter, plop! through the post comes a posh-looking book in German (which I read) from the mother of one of our men extolling the virtues of the same. OK, I give in, I'll read it.

COLOMBIAN COFFEE GOES GREEN

A visit much more within my scope came from the Head of the Ecology Dept. of the Colombian Coffee-Growers Association in Ibagué, capital of Tolima. This is also an excellent connection: of all the organizations in Colombia, this group produces the most sensible, readable, accessible and readily-donated literature on ecological topics - such as compost formation - for the peasant population. We have been distributing their excellent literature since the Campaign began, both in Caquetá and here. The man in question was transfixed as I answered his questions and showed him round the farm; 'How can we use you, what can you do for us?' was his straight-forward question. I told him about the Theatre and our other activities. 'Give me videos, pictures, information, literature - I need it to show secondary-school students', he said. Videos, no, I answered - the rest, I'll see what I can do.

After he left, I spent one whole week of valuable gardening time compiling a thick pictorial folder of the whole history of our Green activities in Colombia. It contains photos, children's paintings, their songs and poems, full-colour organic gardening pictures from magazines, plus a simple running commentary in Spanish, all beautifully laid-out (I had to get several massages a day from Alberto during its making - working 8 or 9 hours a day at my desk is not my favourite position). Anne of course has refused me permission to give the folder away, and I didn't take much persuading. We will lend it,

show it, use it as a permanent exhibition wherever we go - Anne has already made grand use of it in Bogotá. The file contains every aspect of our lives, from our vegetarianism to our theatre, to our political work, our way of living communally, our care for Nature, everything. And on 10th May, we are booked by the Coffee Federation to spend a week in the Ibagué area showing the Green part of our theatre to school-teachers to help them pass on the subject to their children.

...AND SO DO THE SCHOOLS

A very fertile visit from local school-teachers: as a result of our performances last year at 'La Aurora', a local village, their teachers wrote asking me to help with a large ecological project they are engaged in. I invited them round and was mildly horrified to hear they wanted me to train their children in 'ecological mime'. Now I am not a mime artist! though we have produced some beautiful pieces-without-words, all working together. They also wanted permission to use all our Green songs (mainly Louise's) - a big YES of course from us. And they wanted further ideas for their project - they got them. Now they are bringing half the school here at the end of the month for further training...

And so are the teachers of La Pepina, a hamlet adjacent to them. These are the activities I like best - to work at home and still 'spread the word'. I have collected piles of ecological literature (with Anne's help) to give to these people. These schools now have home made tapes of all the Green songs... and my 13-year-old Katie has suddenly flowered into an astonishing song-writer. Few messages hit home so strongly as those flowing from such a young and tender source, even our hardened old musician Fin was in tears.

Creativity is Catching: on my birthday, April 11th, the whole commune put on a home theatre for me, full of new acts and dances, including the participation of many Colombians living here who had not performed before. An explosion of culture, and very moving.

"After nearly 50 years of almost total opposition from the Government, academia and business, the push for change has suddenly burst free from the crushing burden of uninformed disapproval that kept most people from taking alternative agriculture seriously. Agriculture, after all, is not just an industry. It is a way of life. A link between people and the earth. A foundation for the social and political stability of many countries. What is now seen as the alternative in agriculture will become conventional.."

Bob Rodale of the US Organic Gardening Movement

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THE JUNGLE CHILD IN EUROPE SECTION

Louise's education into the world's horrors continues. Just turned 18, she is up to the neck in political campaigns in Ireland, Scotland and Europe, along with Alice, her sister, and all the others at our Headquarters in Donegal. Here are some of Louise's recent comments on her rude awakening:

“It is hard to concentrate on a certain amount of things and get them done, when there are terrible things going on everywhere and every day I hear about more terrible wars and injustice and cruelty to animals and to people, and deaths, and that in Glen of the Downs they are going to build the road no matter about all the protesters, and the bombing of Yugoslavia, and that Ireland is going to join Nuclear Europe.. and I could fill the page. Anyway what I'm saying is that sometimes it is very difficult to keep one's spirits high and be determined, but I'm doing my best. Sometimes one does not know what is the most urgent thing and who needs the most help.

“Jenny, you ask what I think about the way you brought me up, not really letting me know how bad the world really is, and then suddenly letting me rush off into the world all excited to find disaster (well it wasn't exactly like that, you always let us know a certain amount). Well, I want to say I'M VERY GRATEFUL, because kids that watch TV every day and see so much violence both on the news and in films, or hear it on the radio, or in the newspapers, must in the end somehow feel that these things are normal and acceptable and part of every day life. It gets to the point where wars are not only accepted, but become popular: kids play war-games on their computers and game machines where they have the most violent, murderous, bloody war games and that is what kids, especially boys, grow up with. It is totally insane. It is like they are trained from a very early age to like war and accept violence.

“Even though Colombia is a very violent country, I think people there have a more loving point of view towards life than the people here; for example, I have found that there are so many people here that actually agree with NATO bombing Yugoslavia. I would not like to have grown up like that, with no feeling. I'm insensitive enough just as I am - imagine if I had been brought up like most people, I'd probably be campaigning for war! I read once that Man who is so proud of his amazing intelligence and everything he creates, forgets

that he owes his entire existence to eight inches of top-soil and the fact that it rains!

**"However torn by tragedy
Or near to breaking it may be,
My heart can never harden
As long as I have eyes to see,
And windows towards the garden."**

(Annabelle Merrifield "The Healing Garden")

In ending, I wish to salute two groups of people: all members of Ditchling Quaker Meeting, Sussex, on their courageous handling of a difficult personal and political situation that has arisen over connections with Shell Oil Company; and my many over-70's correspondents in England and America. What a marvellous group of people! Many in their '80's, active, alert and caring. Best wishes especially to Diana Grey for her constant campaigning on behalf of animals, and to Mrs. Joyce Wallace for her marvellous encouragement of so many people.

With love to everyone,

Jenny James.

Green Letters Website:

www.afan.org.uk

Contents:

Three days' theatre in coffee country..and a deluge of further requests

The War comes to Icononzo: 7 Policemen shot dead

Green work continues apace

Our youngsters in Europe protest against NATO bombing

Goodbye to a Squirrel with Cancer...

GREEN LETTER FROM COLOMBIA, No. 34.

10th June 1999

"All the virtues of trees will mean nothing unless we can find ways to get massive areas of land reforested - converted from bare hillsides and fields into thriving woodlands. A token planting of one or two trees here and there is not enough. We have to plant trees by the millions, if not by the billions. We can't sit back, delay and believe that industry, large landholders or even the government will do the job. The land that must be reforested is in your hands. the land most suitable for planting is owned by small landholders."

Robert Rodale of America's Organic Gardening Movement

Well, we did what we could to pass on this message during our eventful three days of Green Theatre in Libano, a coffee-growing area a very long hot day's drive from here. Our hosts were the coffee-growers association of Colombia and our venue was a delightful hideaway in gardens and woodland set up specially for such training courses - but accessible only by driving through thick squelching reeking mud at the edge of Libano's open rubbish-dumping tip. During our stay there, the coffee association got so embarrassed by this foul-smelling anomaly that tractors were ordered to improve access, if not reduce the smell.

We were lodged in one room, where 10 of us lay down happily on mats on the cool stone floor - the climate was warmer than we're used to. The room was part of a boarding school for street-children and very well run indeed, except for the leaking handbasins, showers and toilets which our handyman Fin did his best to fix while we were there. The ex-street children were a lively, helpful bunch and it was uplifting to see what was being done for them, with a bit of empathy and quite a lot of good-natured discipline. We put on a special show for them after their school hours.

The response to our theatre was overwhelming. Anne bravely coped with all the requests and enquiries after it as I was exhausted from running the show. There are two main outcomes: one, that we have now made a 60 minute tape of Green Songs and poems and messages in Spanish which we constantly copy and hand out to all visiting teachers and other relevant leaders. Produced on recycled tapes, recorded with one microphone and with batteries run on solar power, the tape has its share of hiccups, but I think the message comes across. If anyone speaks enough Spanish to understand it, or would like to hear it anyway, please apply to Mary Kelly at Atlantis, Burtonport, Co. Donegal for one; we ask only a spare tape (it can be a used one) and postage in exchange.

The second result is a deluge of further theatre requests, the first on 23rd June near Icononzo for another group of teachers on a course called 'Sembradores de Vida' ("Sowers of Life") run by the coffee association; the next, a few days after that, is a week-long tour of many villages in the Planadas region, which is so far to the south of Tolima that we will need to drive two days and camp overnight. Also, the area is run by a different guerrilla group, the ELN (National Liberation Army), generally considered more mad-cap than the FARC, and the people inviting us have to get permission from them to let a load of foreigners in to the area, else we'll find ourselves on the long list of ELN captives.

THE GREEN BUS IS REAL

Claudio didn't wait to buy us a bus for these activities, he has lent us his own lorry for whenever and wherever we want it. And Anne has legalised her driving licence so she can drive it. All we now pay for is petrol - and the institutionalised bribes to motorway police who threaten you with legalised theft of the vehicle for the slightest infringement like not happening to know which vehicle documents one is supposed to carry, as happened to us. Local bus-drivers assure us that this is 'standard practice'. Death of another few monolinear European brain cells..

THE WAR COMES TO ICONONZO:

In Icononzo we have a wonderful friend, Carmen, who was one of the first country-women who helped me in 1988 when I first arrived in this area, before we bought the farm. Then too, the local FARC, having never seen a foreigner in their area, ordered us to leave. At that time, I thought the notion of a 'spy' with three very small blonde children and a horse a rather rare idea and decided to withstand the order. I asked the local contact for the communist party, who was also the police secretary (told you it's a strange country!) if I would be shot if I didn't leave. He had a fit and said, "Of course not." "Then I won't leave," I answered. He had another heart attack. Carmen, wife of the local schoolteacher, bravely put us up on the floor of her tiny one-room living accommodation and later found us an empty wooden farmhouse to stay in while I looked for a farm to buy. Our friendship dates from then (and as you may notice, the FARC did nothing - today I would never risk such naive disobedience).

So on our way home from the theatre days in Libano, all our girls stayed for a 'TV break' at Carmen's, and Anne drove the rest of us home through the mire of our unpaved road from Icononzo to Pueblo Nuevo. We got stuck.. But the gods were with us: an enormous bulldozer happened to be working on the road a few hundred yards away, and to Anne's extreme alarm pushed our suddenly tiny-seeming furniture van through the hideous gravel and mud. Anne, normally cool in the most stressful of circumstances, this time did have a nervous breakdown, being in charge of a borrowed vehicle.

Next day we heard the news: 7 Icononzo policemen shot dead. Then the children came home, white and shaken. It had happened right outside Carmen's house where they were staying, at 9.00 at night. Fifty bullets in each body and the streets awash with blood. The war is polarizing all over Colombia, and this was the FARC's announcement that the area is theirs. They had imposed a curfew, the police had broken it and were ambushed.

Anne had to be back in Bogota the next day, but the area was sealed off; with helicopters flying over and the Army called in. When she finally got to Bogota, she wrote this to us:

"Apparently Serrano, the chief of police, has come out on TV and in 'El Tiempo' (the right-wing daily) saying the massacre of the police could only have happened with the connivance of the local people - which is tantamount to an invitation to the paramilitaries to come in and wreak vengeance on the innocent. On the news it said the guerrilla are threatening to take over Icononzo. They have given out leaflets saying the Mayor's office, the banks and the police station are military targets."

COLOMBIAN JUSTICE:

Readers will remember the report of the killing of two human rights workers recently, one, Ernesto, a friend of Anne's. The case has been taken up by Amnesty International and it is common knowledge that Carlos Castano, the bloodthirsty head of the paramilitary force, was responsible. However, Ernesto's wife reports that the Public Prosecutor telephoned her lawyer to sound out whether she would accept 10 million pesos (about £5,000) as 'compensation' for the death and to stop the investigation. Her lawyer tried to convince her that there was little point in carrying on as the two chief witnesses, the driver and a passenger of the bus where Ernesto had been shot, had obviously succumbed to bribes or threats and had now changed their stories and were saying the attack on the bus was just a 'common robbery' and that 'Ernesto was drunk and refused to co-operate with the criminals and so they shot him.' Ernesto's wife stood her ground, saying she'd pay the money if they gave her husband back alive.

ATLANTIS ECO-TOURS?

In spite of all of which, our Green work continues unabated. The changing weather-phenomena which are causing havoc in some parts of the world are - for now - bringing about paradise conditions in our own weather, giving us light showers and sun instead of catastrophic downpours - though it is scary to see once thundering mountain streams turn into little trickles. However, the effect on the gardens and on us is magnificent; the size of our organic gardens has doubled over and

over again, the quality of the soil, through much male toil, rises daily, and our guinea-pigs as ever oblige us by reproducing at an astonishing rate (in spite of sad visits from a local weasel), providing us with mountains of compost.

And our fame spreads. On 6th May, we were visited by 50 (yes, we counted them!) local schoolchildren and their teachers "to see how we live and to teach them ecology." On May 28th 20 older children from the ecology group of La Aurora, another local school, turned up with their teachers who have now become friends - these are the ones who have appointed me as their 'drama teacher.' I have now recovered from my initial embarrassment and am taking up the challenge. We are to spend several days in La Aurora passing on elements of our Green Theatre to a specially chosen group of teenagers so they can become "eco-mime campaigners" - their teachers' idea!

On 29th May, an even older group of students arrived - from the University of Cundinamarca Biology Dept. (Cundinamarca is the next province to Tolima and we are right on the edge of it.) They were brought here by a long-term friend of ours, Govinda, who runs an eco-tour area (a serious one, not money-making) near a town called Fusagasuga on the way to Bogota. The level of questions in a meeting with these students after they had toured the farm, caves, waterfalls and gardens was very high and before they left they inevitably invited us to their University to perform our theatre - not the most pleasant invitation as their town, Girardot, lies on the River Magdalena and is brain-fryingly hot.

"The future of mankind is dependent on every human being intimately associated with a half acre of ground."

Frank Lloyd Wright, taken from *'Organic Gardening Magazine USA'*

EUROPEAN SECTION:

Well, knock me down with a feather! The Irish Green Party have asked our Mary Kelly to be Green Party candidate for the Donegal area - this is the result of Mary's tireless campaigning on Green issues over there. Mary says she hasn't the foggiest how to go about complying, but she's certainly accepting the challenge. She wrote "I don't expect anyone will vote for a strange woman who collects seaweed and firewood in a wheelbarrow and rides a bike," yet she has already met with local encouragement. Irish country people appreciate sincerity.

Meanwhile, the children - well, Louise at 18 is hardly that, nor is Mary's son Martyn, also 18, recently returned to Ireland from years of living in the jungle with us, and even Alice, still 15, is fast becoming a professional artist, having been 'adopted' by a famous Irish artist, Pauline Bewick. So I had better rephrase that: the jungle-bred teenage department are regularly appearing in the Press. Ireland has an all-Irish-language newspaper '*Foinse*' ('Fountain' I believe it means) and there they were in full colour on the front page with a banner protesting at NATO's insane 'humanitarian' bombing of Yugoslavia. They have also appeared in the '*Irish Independent*' on the same issue, and Patricia McKenna, militant Green Party campaigner and MEP, saw them off in a public event in Dublin when they left for a European Peace March to NATO HQ. Mary continues to write environmental and political articles for '*Saoirse*' ("Freedom"), a Republican Irish newspaper; John who lived here a year has been in a Scottish prison following anti-nuclear weapons activity at Faslane submarine base, now released to continue with his organic-gardening project in Cork; and all our group there are constantly involved in environmental and peace activities. Louise keeps us informed of her still-fresh, shocked impressions of Europe:

"This world scares me: so much noise, so many police around, fast cars in confusing cross-roads, weird-looking people, drunks, cameras watching you in every shop or bank, or even in the street, and just a general vibe 'NOT TO' do anything out of the ordinary: everyone has to behave themselves in a horribly strict way. It is hard to explain, but basically what I feel is that in South America, everyone is more relaxed than here."

Somehow, in the midst of all their activity, the girls have managed to acquire and cultivate a rented garden in the middle of Cork city where they can remember their roots for a moment.

"To dig in the mellow soil.. is a great thing. One gets strength out of the ground as often as one touches it with a hoe.. There is life in the ground; it goes into the seeds; and it also, when it is stirred, it goes into the person who stirs it." Charles Dudley Warner (from '*Organic Gardening Magazine*')

AFAN - 'HURRY' in Spanish, and AFAN is the new name Mary has chosen for the Irish section of our Campaign. It stands for: Atlantis Foundation Action Network and has a wonderfully all-encompassing list of objectives, the first of which is: **"To raise awareness of human degradation and environmental destruction of all kinds all over the globe, to establish the causes of such and to look for and develop sustainable, ethical alternatives to the same."**

EUROPE TO BAN HERBAL MEDICINE ! One thing everyone is going to need to campaign about in Europe is the unbelievable attempt by the European Union to ban herbal medicines unless they have a 'licence'. Mary has details of this latest horror-story for those who have not heard about it.

VALIANT PUBLICATIONS My own education continues apace with the huge number of excellent magazines that are sent my way. I list here some particularly excellent ones (some I've mentioned before, but no apologies).

CORPORATE WATCH Contains cheeky and well-researched information on the machinations of the multi-nationals. A must for anyone concerned with the global anti-environment conspiracies taking place under our noses. Available from: Box E, Ill Magdalen Road, Oxford OX4 1RQ.

The May issue of '*New Internationalist*' concerns itself with Third World Debt and, amongst other things, its devastating effect on the environment as impoverished people are forced to wreck their surroundings in order to survive. Contains details of the 'Jubilee 2000' campaign, a marvellous 'millennium initiative' with broad-based support to simply CANCEL Third World debt. Address: 55 Rectory Road, Oxford, OX4 1BW.

GREEN EVENTS A heartening little newsheet showing 'Green' activities 'in and around London'. Actually 'around' seems to include a lot of England! £8 for 12 issues from: 93 Fortress Road, London NW5 14G. Well worth it if you want to keep in touch.

"GROWING ORGANICALLY" Magazine of the Henry Doubleday Research Association. Specifically for organic gardeners. From: Ryton Organic Gardens, Coventry CV8 3LG

COLOMBIA FORUM Excellent news organisation for those who find Colombia's political situation mind-boggling. Concise, accurate, concerned. From: Mike Simpson, Las Casas Office, 16 Wellington Road, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 7BH.

OUR NEEDS IN COLOMBIA:

In general, we are very happy with a constant supply of gift seed coming in, mainly from America, but we would like: celery, rocket and rhubarb seed. Also, postage costs have suddenly doubled in Colombia and our correspondence is now voluminous, so any small help with postage costs would be much appreciated (Please send to Mary in Ireland - less complicated.). To ward off air-borne infections, we are always hugely grateful to receive grapefruit seed extract, a brilliant immune-system booster (try it yourself if you haven't already). For our theatre work, we need violin strings; green cloth for costumes and backdrops; light, easy classical music scores for violin; 'dog-ends' of

makeup; and any pictures you may come across of dance choreography or booklets on drama or mime teaching!

SQUIRRELS GET CANCER: Outside the little wooden room which I write to you from, I have a constant gentle jungle parade of wildlife, especially birds. Our fruit bushes and trees attract many unafraid visitors, including a former constant companion: a Colombian squirrel, a tiny variety I've never seen in Europe. I had become used to her daily aerial acrobatics through the branches and right down to near my head, daring all for our 'raspberries' (the nearest name for some kind of wild jungle berries).

Then one day she arrived with a hateful lump on her back, a tumour. I stared in disbelief, saw her deteriorated condition, and knew I'd never see her again, and I didn't. All around this area, heavy crop-spraying is the norm. Goodbye little squirrel.

And goodbye and thank you all. Your continual encouragement is our lifeblood.

With best wishes,

Jenny James

Contents:

The Axe Falls: Exile once again

GREEN LETTER No. 35 from Icononzo, Tolima, Colombia

19th August 1999

"The wind, the rain, the mountains and rivers, the woodlands and meadows and all their inhabitants; we need these perhaps even more for our psyche than for our physical survival"

Thomas Berry, author of "Dreams of the Earth" (from Resurgence Magazine)

On Friday 13th August, two days after the Grand Cross in the heavens, and already three weeks away from home on an exhausting Green Theatre tour of the stripped mountain settlements of Planadas in south Tolima, we received an urgent message: **Phone home.** Of course our farm has no phone, but our friend Carmen lives opposite Telecom in Icononzo and is ever-alert to calls.

It was our first afternoon off. Anne and I had spent it under the giant Ceiba tree in the middle of noisy, dirty, brash Planadas inventing a magical series of new plays and acts for our theatre. When the call came, I felt irrationally angry to be disturbed; we quickly hypothesized various disasters that could warrant such an intrusion. 'Oh, perhaps the guerrilla have thrown us out again', I offered.

As Anne climbed the stairs to our theatre home, where we slept on the floor tormented by heat and noise, on her return from the phone, she said, 'You were right'. I stared at her sharply; waiting for her face to break to reveal the joke. It didn't.

We had two more weeks of promised engagements – including a date with ourselves to get a rest, as all of us were exhausted. Our enthusiastic audiences watch two hours of energetic theatre and our 'employers' - the Mayor and Education Secretary of Planadas - ask for more and more shows, never understanding that for each minute of entertainment on stage, there are hours, days, weeks, months, even years of work and discipline and preparation. In the end, I'd had to say, only half-joking, 'Listen, do you realize that in Europe we'd be in prison for exploiting child labour?' That got us the one afternoon's rest before The News fell upon us.

The kids were at a well-earned disco. We four adults sat around quietly absorbing the freshly arrived information. We had one month to leave. This time the reason was clear, unlike in Caqueta: our constant stream of visitors constituted a security risk to our region in an intensifying war situation. We were three days' travelling from home.

We sent for the kids. They came galloping home to our one room above the theatre hall, heard the news, then lay around in little piles quietly sobbing. Two of the Colombians, a boy and a young woman who normally cannot stick each other were crying in each others arms. All 3 Colombians who perform with us opted immediately for going with us, wherever we would go. The large old bus outside the window that through many a breakdown had brought us this far was only one-ninth paid for - one of the nine million pesos it would cost. It would for a while be our only home. In the same phone call came the news that the Irish branch of our community was suffering its 'Grand Cross' too - our house-sale had fallen through. So we were penniless and homeless.

That last sentence was just a bit of drama – I actually love these situations. I rise to them like a carnivore at the smell of meat. The weeping children were horrified at my cool hard-heartedness as I enthusiastically gabbled on with Anne about where we would go and what we would do, how we would organize, and how the Green Campaign would now spread all over Colombia and other countries of South America, just as so many well-placed friends of Anne's in Bogota and Ecuador had for long insisted, as in 'But you must go out and spread your knowledge and your message'. Ever a recluse and Hermit Crab if I get the chance, I'd always found this extremely uninviting. Now there was no choice.

We cancelled the next two weeks' of theatre, including the rather important engagement we had the next day in a guerrilla stronghold, invited and protected by the same Army who were throwing us out back home in the East of Tolima. Colombia is ever paradoxical. The bus wouldn't start next morning of course - starter motor, battery, air-brakes, suspension, all in trouble - just those little details that tend to go on hair-raising mountain tracks where one inch between the outer wheels and the Abyss is just enough and two is a luxury

It was late afternoon before we were on our way, having been bidden a dozen tearful and shocked farewells from all our new friends.

That night was an idyllic foretaste of what a gypsy life might bring (or, as I cynically put it, a Cosmic Carrot to trick us on to the next Awful Bit): a deserted river-beach, natural firewood all around, a star-filled sky, no noise, sweet soft warm insect-free air, soft luxurious bedding we'd carried with us and an efficient vegetarian meal round the campfire; a few songs for a nearby farmer's family, and long long hours of much needed sleep.

During the long hot drive home, I worked out every last detail of our move. The bus was a constant conference chamber. We have till September 15th.

ACTION STATIONS for The Move

Three weeks away, leaving a small caretaking team, and months of hard labour before leaving, has left us with a magnificent vegetable garden overflowing with food. It is strange picking it and not sowing the next crops. There is drought everywhere, but our well-organised sprinklers fed by the mountain stream nearby kept everything damp and green. It is strange not spending our days making compost and digging new beds though. Instead, 3 pack animals a day every day to Pueblo Nuevo taking sackloads of books and clothes for giving away, plus mountains of our gear for bussing to Icononzo. Thank goodness for Carmen, she will store our possessions till we know where we're going. Oh, - and we have a theatre show in Icononzo this Sunday for a radical peasants' organisation.

Approximately three minutes after arriving home at Carmen's house, which is also the Post Office in Icononzo, we were visited by the chief guerrilla contact for the area, who was horrified at the news we had to go and immediately lectured us about not accepting the decision. He guaranteed to get me a meeting with the regional Commander and claimed he'd 'sorted out much worse cases than this'. He didn't know quite what to make of my attitude though. 'You know, if I were a guerrilla commander and a load of gringos appeared in my area, I'd do the same - chuck them out', I said. The thing is, the stipulation of 'no visitors' is one we simply cannot comply with even if we wanted to, as people turn up from all over the world with no notice and what kind of life-style would it be to live with closed doors, even if it could be achieved? So while the local people complain at the guerrilla decision, we busily get on with moving. Yes, once again we lose our forests and streams and fields and gardens and houses and 11 years' of compost; in one month there will be no time to sell our land even in the unlikely event that any Colombian peasant could afford it. But we take with us our teamwork, our knowledge, our experience, our theatre, our determination, our energy, our marvellous band of teenagers - and our two Siamese cats.

Our address is safe for now as Carmen will forward everything to us. You will understand that this is a very short Green Letter. I have a lot of packing to do. We will write soon from our next Green Spot.

With love - and a little surprise - to all of you.

Jenny James.

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Contents:

Dismantling the farm

A Solidarity visit from Heriberto of Chorreras

A very Heavy Visit from a FARC commander

We move to a temporary home at our friend Gilberto's

The theatre shows continue unabated

Offers flood in of Where To Go Next

GREEN LETTER No. 36 El Alto de Icononzo, Tolima, Colombia.

5th October 1999

I think it would be difficult to find a happier, luckier bunch of refugees.

September was a bit of a nightmare alright: first, we shipped out all the young people to the refuge of a friend's farm near Icononzo where they began hacking up the rigid dry clay to make a new vegetable garden - I like to go in style, so I decided to transplant every possible and impossible vegetable when we finally left.

Back on our own farm, life took on a hectic pace: up well before dawn, at 4.0 a.m. every day, The Dismantling began. Everything. Roof, floors, fencing, chicken run, the bath, water pipes, the lot. I wasn't going to spend the next months agonising over what we'd left behind us as in the Caqueta eviction. This time, we had one luxurious month, and we were going to use it well.

We sent the word out immediately that practically everything was for sale, and the farm soon turned into a barter centre. We swapped a cow for a roof-rack and other alterations on our bus. Its a good thing we had Andy. Andy is from Reading, he's 6 foot one inch tall, hairy and strong. As a bath with legs - Andy's - arrived at Pueblo Nuevo, someone would buy it. Every few days, when our beloved old friend Don Hernando's barn got filled to ceiling height with gear, our bus would trundle off, getting stuck the regulation number of times in mud patches, to our halfway house in El Alto de Icononzo, along with its latest batch of transplants, chickens, guinea pigs or cats to be

received by the caring and diligent teenage department looking after our new temporary home. No more afternoons off for anyone, no music, no culture, just Work.

A VERY HATEFUL VISIT FROM A FARC COMMANDER

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Colombia continued to provide its paradoxes. One day a young guerrilla commander of exceptionally aggressive mien decided to visit for the first time ever and throw his weight - or rather the weight of the FARC behind him - around. He was behaving so insolently that I thought for one panic-stricken moment the Colombian Army and not the Revolutionary Army had arrived. After acting like he'd come across some dangerous hideout of Yankee soldiers, he informed me that we were not allowed to sell one centimetre of our land where there were any trees growing as local people would only cut them all down. "Oh, that's wonderful," I replied, "we agree 100%." He stared at me with steely eyes, not having had the menacing effect he'd intended and not knowing what to make of this Englishwoman phenomenon. 'And you must make me out a document handing all your land over to the FARC', he said. 'Certainly', said I and went off to bring my portable typewriter, the one that had written 35 Green Letters. I asked him for the wording he wanted, but he was stumped, so I wrote: "This is to certify that we, the Atlantis Ecological Community, leave all our land in the care of the FARC so that they might protect the flora, fauna and waters therein." He was delighted with it, if a little confused at the way his attempted aggression had fallen so flat.

A VISIT OF SOLIDARITY FROM CAQUETA

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Heriberto arrived. He was the loyal Action Committee man from El Pato in Caqueta, who had helped us with our previous eviction and has fought to preserve our forest lands there ever since. Much of his news from Caqueta was very good indeed: the area we lived in is now part of the almost independent republic of the FARC - a massive area handed over by the Government to them so that peace talks can take place (and which the right-wing military and US government are extremely displeased about, as may be imagined). Heriberto reports that the timber business which had resumed (under the auspices of the Government Forest Protection Agency!) has now been completely stopped; and that hunting has been banned completely so that wild animals not seen for a long while are now returning even as far as the roadside where Heriberto lives.

OUR NEW TEMPORARY HOME

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And now we are living at Gilberto's: he is a dear friend of my own age, an artist, dancer and ecologist, a healer and a carer in every sense. He is the person who convinced me to stay in Colombia way back in 1988 instead of continuing my trek to Bolivia. The new garden we have made on his farm is already enormous, the chickens are laying, the two cows we brought with us give us milk daily, and the chives and sorrel can already be cut. Tristan my grandson (17) goes

once a week back to our old farm to bring the latest crop of blackberries, raspberries, greens and cabbages - and a bit more barbed wire or a few pieces of corrugated iron to sell for the food we now need to buy. The horses have joined us too, after a well-needed week's rest. They had a pretty terrible September too.

AND OUR THEATRE CONTINUES

We are ecstatically happy. We are working on three new acts for the Green Theatre: the next performance (the second since our eviction) is at Icononzo College on 14th October. Many peasants and local community organizations are getting themselves into action to try and reverse our Go order so that we can stay here. The climate is slightly warmer, we are just one hour's walk from Icononzo, but we have had to close our doors to all outside visitors so as not to run a-foul of wartime spy fears again - and our Green Dream continues to come true as the marvel of our compost-making systems and rapid gardens unfolds for everyone to see. Here we are far nearer to neighbours and the guerilla order has served to spark interest far and wide in what we do. Support for us and our work so far seems to be absolute, and there is a remarkable lack of fear in local people of criticizing the guerrilla force - which actually speaks very well for the FARC. In a paramilitary area, criticism would spell instant death.

Gilberto has preserved his own land beautifully, so that we are truly forest gardening, and up there in Pueblo Nuevo, where we used to live, 35 hectares of forest sway undisturbed in the breeze. We have lost nothing.

A SHOWER OF OFFERS OF WHERE TO GO NEXT

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Anne meanwhile works full-time in Bogota to pay off our bus - now half paid for. I hate having a bus, with all its attendant smells and noise and pollution, but never for a moment do I allow the illusion of security to creep over me: at any moment, if only for reasons of pride, the FARC could turn up and insist on completion of the original order: OUT of Tolima.

But so far, the future continues to look extraordinarily rosy - that is, Green. Every time the post arrives, there are more offers of places to go - nay, *requests* to set up elsewhere. An old friend in Ecuador - an Englishwoman herself whom I met on a different exile many years ago when my girls were tiny and I was homeless and penniless - has offered us a hotel in the mountains to run. Contacts in Bogota have offered us guardianship of a National Park in Southern Colombia, and to be paid to do theatre for indigenous people and *campesinos* (peasants). Another friend has offered us a choice of a farm near cloud forest - very cold! - or one down in much hotter country. One thing for certain, wherever we go, we will never buy land again, but only work on it for other

people, care for it, and get others to do likewise; that way, we will always be more mobile, less attached, and more able to spread our work far and wide.

Buying forest to save it is a nice notion, and it did actually work, though not quite in the way we expected - but in a country with a potent Green guerrilla army, the need is no longer very obvious. I regret not one day of our back-breaking work (what else would I want to do with my life?) nor a *peso* of the hard-earned cash, and I do hope that those who helped us will feel likewise, even though a heavily-armed guard for the purchased forest might not be what any of us had in mind! It certainly is safe - until the Americans start bombing it or spraying it with Monsanto products of course. But that will be another story.

I will keep in touch with you all! Blessings and many thanks.

Love,

Jenny James.

Contents:

Our children leave for Bogota after FARC militia aggression
Jenny invited to join ANUC, the agricultural workers' union
More hostility from FARC militia
Moving reactions to our leaving
Corruption of Government Eco-Agencies
In praise of 'Keeping Small and Direct'!

COLOMBIAN RAINFOREST CAMPAIGN

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GREEN LETTER No. 37, 8th Nov. 1999

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El Alto de Icononzo. Tolima, Colombia.

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It is so simple to me, I cannot see why people of today do not understand that the soil is like a bank account. Who has a bank account anywhere where you can only withdraw and never

deposit? The rainforest is a depository of our future - our planetary bank account. "

Native Healer, Belize, Central America

The children have all gone now, and a few of the oldies too. Only myself and two men to keep the gardens and animals going in our temporary home, and Gilberto, our friend and host, of course remains with us.

After a second aggression, in which 3 very young guerrilleros accosted our lads when they were removing transplants from our evacuated farm (as permitted by the first, friendly, commander when he told us of the order to go), I didn't think this a very healthy environment for our young ones, in spite of the seeming tranquillity and beauty of this farm.

Through contacts of Anne's in Bogotá, we have been given half a building (that is, half-constructed) and a hectare of steep black soil at the edge of cloud forest an hour's drive north of Bogotá. There the young ones are organising the next phase of their lives, while I pick up the political pieces of our second exile in two years.

Jenny Invited to Join Agricultural Union

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There are benefits involved in being an 'ecological refugee'. I have been invited to join ANUC, the national peasants' union, a radical and down-to-earth organization. I am probably the first 'gringa' member ever. Yesterday I attended my first meeting and was delighted to find the speaker, who was the head of the Tolima area, humorous, sensible and practical. In Caqueta, my blood had boiled so many times listening to arrogant 'environmental agency' speakers talk down to seasoned *campesinos* as if to a load of first-year school-kids, and - in danger of causing an unseemly rumpus - I never returned. I had also in my years in Colombia attended local meetings of well-meaning but oh-so-dreary Communist cells. Now, technically 'homeless', I felt I had come home. After the meeting, I somewhat awkwardly presented myself to the speaker, finding it quite hard not to cry as I described our situation and offered him a loan of a pictorial history of our 11 years in the area, made up of photos, kids'

paintings, shots of the Green Theatre, poems, songs, leaflets and letters. He was tremendously receptive and took it away for a fortnight to read it properly. The local leaders of ANUC, several of them lifelong communists, are all entirely opposed to what the guerrilla has done and totally supportive of us, as well as absolutely determined to 'get it sorted out'.

Further Hostility from the Guerrilla

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A further aggression from a younger, gun-swinging commander had occurred the day before the meeting: a worried *campesino* from Pueblo Nuevo (the village we had to abandon) sought me out on our new farm to tell me that the hectare of land he had purchased from us for a couple of hundred pounds and on which he had already planted crops, had been taken from him by the guerrilla, and that this would be happening to anyone who had purchased from us. And could we pay him back the 500,000 pesos?

At that precise moment, some of our new neighbours were purchasing an old hen from us so that we could buy carrots and onions in the week to come, that is: we had not one *peso*. My mind went into a flat spin - of rage that the 'people's army' would treat the peasants in this way, and extreme worry as to how I could help this man. I guaranteed to take responsibility one way or another for the situation and flew down the grass, mud and stone track to Icononzo, arriving beetroot-red from the run, to let my most significant contacts know the latest.

I arrived in time to say a second goodbye to my youngest daughter Katie (14) who was with the last busload of our departing 'refugees', held up because of the need to get police permission to transport our own furniture (it is generally assumed in Colombia that everything is stolen goods).

"Katie," I said, "I just want you to know, and to tell the others, that if you hear I have been killed, it is not sad and I went into it with my eyes wide open. I'm very sorry, but I have to do this." I was in such a rage with the guerrilla for their treatment of the *campesinos* that I was prepared to do anything. Our man in Icononzo (sorry, too delicate to give names) put his fatherly arm round Katie and stage-whispered, "Don't worry, we won't let anything happen to your

mum," and she gave me a long, silent searching look that contained a Universe of questions and acceptance, as if she were looking at her mum for the first time as a young woman, no longer a skittish child.

Later that day, I got my comeuppance for my bravado as our bus-driver turned into a sideturning in Icononzo and I turned into a jelly of instinctual fear, grabbing an amused Gilberto, as I saw the 'road' was only a few yards long and led to a sheer drop. The driver had turned into it to reverse - small comfort as he stalled and mishandled the reverse hill-start to my continuing panic. 'What I meant,' said I to Gilberto, "was that I am prepared to die if it is useful and necessary in the cause of justice, not that I want some idiot to drive me over a cliff."

“The majority is not silent. The Government is deaf.”

(Canadian 'Smallholders' Magazine)

MOVING REACTIONS TO OUR LEAVING

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I want to record here just a few of the reactions that came our way as a result of our enforced leaving:

In Planadas where we heard the news during our August theatre tour, a young teacher who had seen our performance handed us a letter with tears in his eyes. Here is an extract:

"On occasions like this, one's heart is vulnerable ... the energy that you all transmitted and the message you left us were marvellous ... I shared a few moments only with you, but I saw you, I felt you, and now my heart is heavy, because people who really want to live and to save the planet are very few . . "

A man I have never met but have been writing to for years since he saw an article about us in a (Conservative) national newspaper in 1994, wrote:

"I don't know whether you will ever receive this; I can't imagine where you might be now. I don't understand war. A war begins by seeking justice because it is believed there is no alternative - and look how it ends up. And at how difficult it is to get back to peace and serenity and balance. In the end, worse outrages are committed than those it was planned to correct. I mourn for my country and for the extremes to which we have come. . . . I once heard you mention that you might go to Bolivia. It would be a great loss for our country if we weren't able to continue receiving the teachings you are communicating. If other people were to say the same things as you, it wouldn't have the same value, because your philosophy comes from history: it is the consequence of the crisis of the developed world. I trust that these blows, provoked by a lack of understanding of your philosophy, will not change your course, in fact I know they won't. If a movement like yours were to disappear, it would be a great loss for the planet."

Julio Jimenez, Medellin. (Ornithologist)

And Anne recorded for those who can't write, the following incidents involving local peasant friends in Pueblo Nuevo:

"Two very rough-looking local men came visiting soon after the news broke, looking more like they'd come to rob us, as Fin jokingly

said. But no, they came to tell us how sad they were that the only people who protected the forest and the wild animals were being forced to leave. One was nearly crying.

"Don Hernando, owner of the local open-sided bus and in his 70s, made a special visit on horseback, his only one ever, along the muddy, difficult track. He couldn't get over how beautiful the farm had become in our time here - he had known it before our arrival - and kept repeating that it had to be protected.

"After our last Icononzo theatre performance, a man got up and made an impromptu speech about the message of our theatre being beautiful and important and if some of it was critical of how they, the Colombian peasants, abuse their land, then so it should be and all the more reason to listen even more!

"Don Pedro, our loyal luggage-guarding shopman throughout the years, in his 70s, said that ever since he heard the news he's had a 'guayabo' - the word usually used for a hangover.

"Our friend Gilberto, walking home to his farm with some neighbours after our theatre show reported that they talked of nothing else but the 'message'. He scolded them for valuing us too late!

"This same feeling has now been repeated so many times that I can't remember all the faces as we've constantly been receiving 20-30 visitors a day since the word got out."

(that was in August 1999)

"We cannot live without the earth or apart from it, and something is shrivelled in a man's heart when he turns away from it and concerns himself only with the affairs of men." Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings - taken from 'Organic Gardening Magazine USA'

I want to remind our Green Letter readers that the reactions you are hearing about are the far-ranging results of the work of a very small group of people: I say this to give heart to anyone who ever thinks: 'but what can I do - I am only one, what difference can I make?' or to

any group who thinks, 'What can we possibly achieve, there are only four or five of us, and no money?'

The reflections I hope I have given you over the four years of our campaign in Colombia show the depth and strength attainable by a few people uniting in absolute simplicity and direct contact with a problem: it is the power of water on a stone for a thousand years as opposed to the split-second power of a hydrogen bomb. I am as prone as anyone to absolute depression - when I have had the misfortune of reading that crass representative of American capitalism, 'Time' magazine, for example - but I just want you all to know that never have I felt the warmth and worth of our work so strongly as in these days and weeks when we 'should' be feeling defeated, destroyed and homeless. I certainly often feel like crying - but it is always when yet another dose of kindness, solidarity, support, outrage, honesty and trust comes our way from local people - "local" that is, to yet another temporary home on our long green journey. The green message is definitely going home wherever we travel, and I don't get the feeling it would stand the same chance through some government pamphlet backed only by hypocrisy.

Corruption of Govt. 'Eco-Agencies'

Apropos of which, here is something Anne wrote some time back from Bogotá:

"I'm fed up! In these past few days, I have been to several government institutions which deal with matters ecological. At least, that's the claim. I ask for leaflets for the peasant people. I get 10, or 20, or 30. I tell them I'm working in down-to-earth ecology where there's still some Nature left to worry about i.e. the countryside. I talk to very nice caring people, usually young and politically correct who earn in a month what a well-off *campesino* earns in a year. I

look around the tastefully done-up offices replete with all varieties of mod-cons, computers, photocopiers, lovely glossy photos, posters and posh paintings and I know how much grant money, what large percentages of the millions of dollars that Colombia receives from the rich northern countries to protect its 'biodiversity' and its oxygen-producing rainforests go into all this. I know some of the talented people who do the art-work and the excellent texts of the many excellent posters and booklets, which mostly end up in the store-rooms and basements gathering dust; and when I say I'd like a few hundred please for the schools we work with and for the hundreds of peasants we deal with directly, nearly everyone gets uptight.

"And this is only the tip of the iceberg. The real injustice is how many of those 'eco-dollars' ever get used for anything beyond Bogotá eco-business, which means computers, posh studies by posh people for a very posh price, posh jeeps to go and do the posh studies and all the paraphernalia of rubbish-producing city life.

"In spite of all the self-justifying arguments of these city-slickers, we've proved that it's all unnecessary. You don't need computers, cars, secretaries or vast quantities of money to be effective. You need committed people who practise what they preach, who show that all the theories in all the prettily produced pamphlets are practicable and FUN and that peasant does not equal second-class citizen.

"The Chinese got it right: send all the students and bureaucrats to the country. The country comes first! What does a city produce that is useful? Nothing! It only produces the need to consume."

That was Anne's very justified rant for the day, with which I bid you all farewell for now.

Love, Jenny

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GREEN LETTER No. 38 from Colombia

Salitre Alto, Tabio, Cundinamarca

10th December 1999

Hello everyone from a very different angle on Colombia!

We are now living at 9,262 feet on a steep mountainside above the little 'colonial' country town of Tabio in the province of Cundinamarca, north of Bogotá. Our new address is: AA 241858 Bogotá for writing, and for visiting: the house of Tomas Estevevez, Salitre Alto, Tabio, Cundinamarca reachable by bus from the centre of Bogotá. The reports are that there is no guerrilla presence in this area.

And the reports from Icononzo are that the more aggressive of the two commanders who told us to leave has been hauled up by his superiors for many infringements of the FARC's internal code of law. What this will mean to us in the future, if anything, is not yet known.

Since we were forced out, many little towns in Tolima were taken by the guerrilla, and there were several deaths - executions of policemen and accidental civilian deaths. For now our eyes are set only on the present and the future and we do not entertain the possibility of returning, though we maintain constant contact with reliable friends down there.

Meanwhile our lives have taken off on a whoosh of energy characteristic it seems of this stage of world evolution - encompassing both disaster and great hope.

CLIMATE SHOCK AND ALTITUDE SICKNESS

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First, we had to cope with the shock of a new climate. Now I know I am English and England isn't noted for its tropical climate ... but after 11 years in the mild warm air of Tolima and Caquetá it is a shock to have to wear several jumpers in the morning and to have to thaw one's hands out after using a typewriter! Also finding oneself out of breath after a pathetic little run up and down the garden ... this is it, old age has overtaken me, thought I, . until I checked with the young ones and found everyone was feeling it. The altitude! of course! After all those years on Inishfree Island where the highest rock was just 65 foot above the waves . .

TWO MORE GARDENS

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We have wreaked miracles: a massive area of this steep mountainside is already dug, terraced, composted and planted - though the slowness of growth takes us back to our Northern origins - and now a second married couple have handed over their mountain farm to us, half an hour away by car and so we have a second huge garden to dig and plant. The families who have taken us under their wing are long-term acquaintances of Anne's through her astrology charts and they work directly for the Ministry of the Environment on educational and artistic projects. They already have plans for us stretching over the next year doing Green Theatre for all the schools in about 3 departments.

But for now it is digging and building - cabins for the boys, a kitchen and wood stove for us all, an art-room for Alice who is being asked to do 'environmental'

murals wherever she goes; all very rustic and simple and all requiring terracing the steep mountainsides we live on.

LIVING WITH THE BOGOTA BOURGEOISIE

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Meanwhile, after what feels like a lifetime of living with and amongst peasant people, it is somewhat of a shock to find ourselves mixing with the professional classes who love to send us their under-stimulated youngsters to 'learn to work' and who delightedly cut wood and shift compost and dig impossible thick turf to form gardens. Suddenly vegetarians and vegans and health food enthusiasts and all manner of environmentalists and eco-theorists are seeing what it means to live in a truly ecological way and the effect on them is quite amusing: they bring whole parties of their friends to regard us working in the gardens covered in mud and scantily dressed - for when that overhead sun shines through the thin air, it is very hot indeed for a few hours before 'winter' sets in again. Here we have all four seasons each 24 hours.

At first, I agonised over the turn our lives had accidentally taken: I had vowed to spend my life amongst peasants and in the jungle, so what was I doing bringing my Tribe to an exclusive middle-class mountainside? The pure humanity, depth, concern and ultimately, the simplicity, of all our new friends has answered me: we are living amongst and relating intensively to the very class of people who have the chance of bringing about change in Colombia: the informed, already converted, very green-thinking intellectuals who are willing to open their mouths, put their foot in it and stick their necks out to bring about change in favour of the Colombian forests and wild-places, its water, earth, animals and farmlands. As an unexpected, unsought-after but karmically fairly logical step in this strange Green journey I bow down and offer our services! However, when I view unaccustomed electric lights at night, or hear cars, for goodness' sake, or flinch under the attack of loud weekend music, or torture myself about our participation in it all... I do think that as soon as the Cosmos allows, we will be scurrying back to the jungle.

BUS WITH ITS WHEELS IN THE AIR

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And then there's the Bus. Not yet paid for, the much-needed agent of our many removes in the last months - how else would our chickens, guinea pigs, roofing materials, pots and pans still be with us? - met with its share of misfortune. 22-year-old Billy, son of Mary Kelly who cares for our Irish section, was taking it down the steep hill in preparation to begin the move to our second new farm, when the air brakes went. A driver with only a few weeks' experience Billy

yelled to the only passenger, Tristan, my 17-year-old grandson, who promptly jumped from the bus, the back wheels missing him by inches. Billy meanwhile, at ever increasing velocity, somehow managed to steer the bus away from the vulnerable small houses at the sides of the narrow one-track mountain road. But in doing so, he had to take a sharp bend at a ridiculous speed. The bus turned over twice, travelled on its roof and came to rest in someone's field. A lady, whose house it had narrowly missed, viewed the bus passing her window with its wheels in the air. She ran out horrified calling 'Where is the driver?' thinking to find him mangled. However, Billy - one of our theatre acrobats and jugglers - had parted company from the bus feet first through the non-existent windscreen after the bus's first turn, and taken off running fast down the hill in case the bus had a notion to follow him. He turned up beside the astonished lady and introduced himself. He had one minuscule scratch on his arm, and a very sorry-looking bus. Tristan, looking like a ghost, came running down the hill thinking to find his best friend was dead.

HELP FROM THE MAYOR OF TABIO

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Why the accident and why the miracle of no fatalities and what if there had been vehicles or people coming UP the hill....none of it bears thinking about. The Mayor of Tabio offered the council crane... "We must help these people, they are war refugees"... A second crane was needed to pull the first one out as it had got stuck. I have not been to see the bus; it was bad enough hearing the accident from my garden and thinking about what could have happened to the boys or pedestrians. Evidently it has sustained no internal injuries (she's an old-style tank) but is a general wreck externally. Billy has been offered local work to help pay for her and the boys have become religious devotees of motor mechanics ... I think it was a good 10 days after this news arrived before I breathed out again.

SONG-WRITER KATE

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14-year-old Katie writes new songs every few days, about Life, Love, the Environment, War & Peace. I said to her one day, 'Why don't you become our commune Bard and write the story of our recent evictions?' Usually writing in Spanish, she came up with a gem - the melody will certainly be on a future Green Tape for our supporters. For now, some of the words:

We've been living on this farm for many peaceful years
But now my eyes are full of tears
The guerrilla say we have to go

Why? I don't know.

Chorus: *So we pack up our bags
 And we put them in the bus
 A few bumps, a few jumps
 And a little bit of fuss
 But in the end we always do it,
 We always get through it.*

And now here we are with all our gear
We've made a new home here
But the Guerrilla have come once again,
Oh dear, what a pain.....

So we pack up our bags and put them in the bus etc.
(Chorus)

In this place we're going to start a garden again
Bring all the girls and all the men
But soon we hear we have to leave it.
Oh dear, I can't believe it.
So we etc.

We have a garden here and a garden there
Soon we'll have a garden everywhere
I wonder where the next one will be?
Maybe here right under me.

If not, we'll pack up our bags and put them in the bus etc.

Oh, the bus had a crash and it's upside down
We have no cash, we've spent the last pound
I don't know what we'll do,
Oh dear, what about you?

Now we can't go anywhere because of the bus
And I don't know what's going to happen to us
But in the end we always do it,
We always get through it!

One day in the garden, I said to the men, 'You know what's going to happen, don't you, once word gets around that we make organic gardens at this speed? We'll be inundated with busy professional people begging us to make gardens for them . It wasn't long coming. Letters from Anne (she lives and works for us in the centre of Bogotá) indicate a stream of requests - including from the son of one of the recent Presidents of Colombia, Belisario Betancourt. And meanwhile the two families we live with ply us with ever more requests, suggestions, offers, openings ("Would Katie like to sing her Green Songs on children's TV?"). Personally, I can't think further than trying to institute an organic house-waste collection system in Tabio and how many beds we can dig today? And how on earth are we going to bear the Millennium celebrations when the Catholic festival called 'Conception' meant 24 hours of fire-work rockets and racket that had us in Hell.

Excuse me, could anyone show me the way to the Jungle?

I wish you all a very peaceful Xmas and New Age (what's the decibel level in your area?).

More in a month .. with love, Jenny

Contents:

The kids clown for food

A friend escapes 'execution' by the FARC

Katie's song 'Colombia Hermosa' gets famous

A psychic encounter of a very strange kind

Environmental Minister destroys Bogota's old trees

A visit to the Embera Indians

Food shortage and Permanent Drought

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GREEN LETTER No. 39 from Colombia.

Tabio, Cundinamarca.

23rd January 2000

"You should live as though you might die tomorrow; but you should farm as though you expect to live forever "

(Country quote sent by Jon Holford, boat surveyor, Cork)

Hello Everybody,

The rain - more like mountain mist - that has come to these parched parts enables me to write to you today, as for the past month I have had to spend my days watering to save our nascent food-supply. Our economic basis has been the teenagers of the community, who every weekend go out juggling and clowning in the town squares, meeting with tremendous response, generous donations and occasionally a special engagement to perform. They love it - but have had to find out the hard way what food costs when you don't dig it up from your garden.

Close Brush with Death at Hands of FARC

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One day, an ecologist friend, Govinda, one of the people who offered us refuge when we were evicted by the guerrilla, turned up with rucksack, wife and child. Very calmly he told me that ten armed guerrilla soldiers had arrived at his house on the edge of a nature park he guards, had accused him of being a paramilitary, tied his hands behind his back and taken him out to the road to shoot him. He kept talking to them. He didn't stop. His name is not Colombian, but an assumed Indian name and I believe he has studied some Eastern doctrine. Maybe that kept him calm. He convinced them that their information was nonsense. And they let him go. That was when I realised just how lucky we'd been.

In another part of Colombia, there is a rural community called 'La Nueva Atlantis' – 'The New Atlantis' – (nothing to do with us). They are now refugees - kicked out by paramilitaries.

Offer of a Future Settlement

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The lady Director of a park in the south of Colombia has offered us a farm and work teaching peasants re-settled on land given by the Government to keep them out of the National Park; she wants us to spread the organic and ecological message amongst them. Only one problem: we'd have to get the OK from the local FARC unit, that is, from the guerrilla army who have twice taken our land from us. We have declined for now.

"Colombia Hermosa"

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Meanwhile 14 year old Katie has written her 26th song. This one praises Colombia in a very sensitive manner and is becoming a real 'hit': it has been sung on radio and television, on buses and in parks. It has people, wet-eyed, sitting up and listening: *"Colombians, behind all the violence, lie hidden happiness, tenderness, love, simplicity and freedom: don't give up on your country,"* are some of the words. Well, we haven't, not yet.

Surreal Encounter

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Something strange happened to Anne the other day. She was wandering round a rather seedy part of Bogotá she'd never been to before looking for a birthday present for her son, when a notice above a tiny shop caught her eye: 'Books on parapsychology'. She stopped to peruse, when a little old man with blue eyes called her in: *"Come in, you work with other planets,"* he said. She grinned and said, *"You mean I'm an extra-terrestrial?"* *"No, no, an astrologer, you have an astrologer's face."* Anne, although very psychic herself, was somewhat amazed at his accuracy. He then did a reading for her, refusing payment, and telling her many perfectly correct details about her life. Then he said, *"Ask me something."* She said, *"Will our community stay in Colombia?"* *"You will stay for one year and then you will go to a place called B-B-B- Bolivia!"* Well, we'll see.

'Eco-Colombia' lives on

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Over a year ago, I wrote a 'Green Fantasy' for Colombia's future, called it **'Eco-Colombia'** and read it in front of various officials and international intellectuals at a pro-bicycle conference. It still circulates today. Anne showed it to some of the female leaders of the Solidarity Network, a Government organisation for refugees and the very poor. She reports they got very excited, saying, *"We want this to come true, we're going to make this come true!"*

And two days ago, I was visited by a Nature-film maker who to my astonishment began quoting me word for word an article I'd written in 1994, **'Message from a European Woman'** which warns Colombians not to follow the false path of Western 'development'. Colombia is nothing if not receptive!

'Environment Ministry' destroys Bogota's old trees

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Other small points of light amidst the darkness of the war here: the citizenry of Bogotá rebelled against the truly Satanic policy of the 'Environmental Ministry' who decided to cut all the trees in Bogotá

down 'to replace with native species'. 'Ecology' gone mad - someone's theory, foreign funding and national insanity. Many beautiful massive old trees had to fall before the citizens' rebellion finally put an end to it.

The present Minister of the Environment, **Juan Mayr**, is a serious environmental disaster: he pours contempt upon the Embera Indians who walked for weeks from their homelands to Bogotá relying on people's generosity to protest the flooding of their territory for dam-building; he told them they were wasting their time and refused to see them; and he gives licences without blinking a 'green' eye for petrol exploration. One good thing he *is* doing however, in conjunction with the otherwise awful Mayor of Bogotá, is fomenting more and more cycle-ways and now, in February, a 'car-free day'.

However, it is noticeable that the 'Green Education' which the law now requires is definitely having effect and there are very few people, young or old, urban or rural, who do not know something of environmental protection - and this gets thrown back in the face of the very 'ungreen' Ministers who come to power.

Anne reports on a visit to the Indians

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On 25th January, 14 year old Laura, myself and a Colombian friend, Hector, went to meet the Embera Katio Indians who are camping outside the Ministry of the Environment. There are almost 200 of them camping in most organised fashion in a small space and the huge ugly ex-American Embassy that houses the Ministry looks a lot more "environmental" for their wood fires, happy children and their colourful, homely presence. I asked them what do they most need in their camp and they said:

1. Company, as they get bored with nothing to do in the city. So we sang for them and they loved Katie's Colombia song and when I sang a silly song I'd made up about preferring to be buried in the garden than in a graveyard so that I could be recycled as compost, they all nodded very seriously at each other in agreement. I've also organised friends to go and meet them and give their children art workshops.
2. But most importantly they need international support in the form of letters to the Colombian government protesting against the illegal flooding of their land in Urrá. The government, supported by the paramilitaries, began flooding their tribal lands without relocating the Indians. Anyone who would like to write should mention in their letter that: -

- a. The government should suspend the illegal filling of the Urrá reservoir.
- b. That the govt. should begin to negotiate with the Embera Katio Indians who have walked 800 kms. in order to talk to the ministers involved and are being ignored.
- c. That the govt. should urgently resolve the ecological problems caused by the damming of the Sinu river, i.e. the drought that is causing famine downstream of the dam, an area of marshes that used to be periodically flooded in the rainy season.
- d. That the rights of the Embera Katio Indians be respected as guaranteed by national and international laws.

In case you feel that one little letter won't make any difference, I can assure you that the Colombian Government is hypersensitive to international opinion as they are desperate for international funding and that often depends on their human rights record.

I've had personal experience of this in the case of the murder of my friend Ernesto Gonzalez, who was shot by the paramilitaries on his way to Bogotá in October 1998 because he fought for prisoners' rights. The state refused to investigate his death until Amnesty International publicised his case and many people wrote letters demanding justice. Then they began the investigation.

Food Shortage and Two Dry Settlements

Only myself and two men remain on our first settlement in Tabio: we look after the very large gardens we have formed in order to feed the rest of our people, mainly youngsters, who are busy building, organising and digging on the farm of other new friends of ours who begged us to make them a garden. I went to visit the young ones yesterday for the first time and found them very happy in spite of what seemed to me exceedingly difficult conditions: no water supply (they have to climb down an incredibly steep track to a tiny trickle of a stream), overcrowding (but kids seem to like living in a heap!), very little money - just what they can earn juggling at weekends, plus occasional gifts of food from kind visitors who help out, and a scarily dry garden where they recycle even their washing-up water.

Peripatetic Plants!

However there's one really nice thing about not being absolutely sure where your next food is coming from - it makes you very grateful when it does appear and it tastes all the better! For instance, the lady who has lent us her house and land brought 'mushroom compost' from a commercial establishment, and I found it to be full of bits and pieces of unused mushroom - so I sent several bags of it to the kids for their dinner; wild sorrel and watercress grow everywhere, and after just two months, I am able to supply a bag of greens and salad daily. Some of these foodstuffs come from the best-travelled plants in Colombia: transplants taken from Caquetá to Tolima, then to an interim farm near Icononzo, then up here to Tabio Farm No.1 - and then to the kids' farm. Our care ensures they are still thriving.

Occasionally our American supporters send gifts of strange and unaccustomed foods, not always as organic or truly vegetarian as I would wish, but we are in no position to be fussy. Also, on arriving at this new height, one of the first seed parcels to arrive was for very very hot country - and a very large quantity it was too. I despaired only for a moment, then phoned Anne and she got it donated to a project for peasant people living in a truly hot climate. Plenty of very cold country seeds have arrived for us too... so we are surviving to see and foment yet another Green day.

Herewith my news for now, with love to you all, and more next month.

Jenny James.

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Our young ones risk going to his funeral in Icononzo

Billy visits our abandoned farm – so do the FARC

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Colombia’s Astro-Chart, by Anne

Green Theatre at Bogota’s Car-free Day

Repeated Request to settle in Southern Colombia

GREEN LETTER No. 40 from Tabio, Cundinamarca, Colombia.

3rd March 2000

With heavy heart I have once again to report the death of a close and dear friend, Don Pedro Garzon, shopkeeper of a minuscule little cabin in Pueblo Nuevo where we lived for 11 years before being thrown out by the guerrillas.

Don Pedro ('don' in Spanish is a sign of respect not a forename) was like a granddad to us, supporting us throughout all our trials, critical of the guerrilla, yet forced to receive them regularly as his was the only 'centre' in tiny Pueblo Nuevo: there they played 'pool' and drank their drinks. He welcomed and helped all our visitors and kept all our luggage safe till it could be collected by mule. He was everyone's dad.

On February 11th, the 31st anniversary of my own father's death, I felt strangely depressed and could find no reason. Till later, when a loyal contact in Icononzo phoned us with the news: Don Pedro had been taken from the local open-sided bus, which was driven by another friend of ours, and shot with 18 bullets by three armed men. The funeral would be next morning at 9:00 a.m.

We are 6 hours by road from Icononzo and had no money. How could I get a group of us to the funeral? I phoned Anne and she went scurrying around friends to borrow the fare. Mary's son Billy was in tears, we sent him with our last pennies to represent us. Then Andy ran off in the middle of the night to our other farm to encourage my own girls to go, and later I heard that 14-year-old Katie and 16-year-old Alice left immediately to get to Bogotá as best they could - a kind English visitor lent them the fare.

They reported that the funeral was the biggest Icononzo had ever seen and that although we are 'banned' from being there by the guerrilla, everyone fell into their arms, amazed and delighted that we had achieved to be with them on this day. The inevitable shrugs and downcast eyes when the question was asked: Who killed Don Pedro? And WHY? 'The paramilitaries,' said some, 'the guerrilla,' said others; but most said '*Quien sabe?*' - '*who knows?*' the official reply in fear-drenched Colombia.

The guerrillas would hate Don Pedro for his outspoken criticism of them, including his disgust at them sending us away. Another beloved friend, Don Hernando, like Don Pedro a man in his '70s, was driving the bus when it was held up: "*Quick, move on!*" said the armed men, "*or we will kill you all.*" Don Pedro, white and terrified, said, "*Please don't leave me alone!*" Seconds later the shots rang out. Don Hernando was paralysed with fear and grief to leave his friend.

All over Colombia, every day, this scene is repeating itself. Don Pedro, large, friendly and outspoken, in a country where it is safer to be small, closed-off and silent. As familiar to us as your own dad or uncle or next-door neighbour. No ecologist he, but supportive of us for 11 long years. The relief of crying has not come to me, this death is too outrageous, too big. And he bore an uncanny facial resemblance to Eduardo Rincon, with his shock of thick grey hair and his penetrating eyes. Don Pedro, I dreamt of you and my other dead friends last night. If there is such a thing as energy after death, I hope in some form you saw those hundreds of people helpless with grief in each other's arms at your being ripped from them.

When I first experienced death in Colombia, that of my ecologist friend Luis Arenas, and was scurrying round Florencia, capital of Caqueta, trying to get some support from the green movement there to investigate his murder, I failed, as another man living in the mountains of the Macarena in S.E. Colombia had also been killed for his environmental activities and the movement was busy with this death. His name was Melco, and I never knew him. But a short while back, in the house where we are taking refuge in Tabio, I was introduced to a sunburnt and work-worn woman in her '40s. His wife. With a large brood of children, she has stayed on their farm, refusing to be budged by fear, has confronted the neighbour who killed her husband, and determinedly carries on her green work.

Billy visits our forcibly abandoned farm

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And so do we. Billy, somewhat riskily, went up to see our abandoned farm in Pueblo Nuevo. He said it is very beautiful, covered with vines and flowers, a veritable wilderness. It is also evidently known as the local guerrilla camp. 'El Mono Jojoy', one of the FARC's top military leaders, evidently comes from the Alto de Icononzo - the interim hamlet we sheltered in for a few weeks after our 'exile' - and spent Christmas in Icononzo. The area is now openly run by the guerrilla in an increasingly territorial civil war.

Anne, who also went to Don Pedro's funeral, went to stay on the Icononzo farm of Gilberto, our longstanding friend who gave us his land to cultivate while we were deciding where to go next, and she was able to cook a lovely 'green' meal from all the vegetables I had planted whilst there. Gilberto, like many friends left behind, is in bits about our going and longing to follow us. We also heard of many other people who had to abandon the region, forced by one side or the other in a war in which, like so many other civil wars, causes people in their paranoia to turn on their own political allies in fear and frustration.

The Displaced of Bogota take over Red Cross HQ

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Here in Bogotá, Anne has made friends with the female leaders of an excellently organized group of displaced families who have fled violence from all over Colombia, many after the murder of their men-folk by either paramilitaries or guerrilla. There are 400 families, sleeping like sardines in the Red Cross building in Bogotá, unhelpt by the Government who do not want the 'desplazados' - internal refugees - to organize as a force - there are 2 million in all Colombia, a quarter of whom are in Bogotá.

Here is Anne's report:

"On 22nd Jan. I went to see a young black woman I'd met, one of the leaders of the 'desplazados' who have taken over the Red Cross building situated in one of the poshest parts of Bogotá. A lot of international aid has been sent to Colombia for these people but of course none of it ever reaches them.

Police Get Heavy with 'Desplazados'

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"When I arrived, the police guarding the place were unusually unfriendly and wouldn't let me in. My friend had come out to talk to me - we were arranging her visit to our farm as a first step to setting up gardening programmes for refugees. After our talk, I walked her back to the gate of the compound and they wouldn't let her in. Soon a dozen more police on horses and with dogs arrived and tried to bully us and the several more refugees who'd arrived, to go away. A lot of machine guns were in evidence and plainclothes police and more and more police arriving by car, including some very-high-up-looking brass.

The feeling of the police was ugly, but my new friends didn't seem in the least bit afraid. I suppose they've seen worse.

"I stayed and tried to talk to some of the young policemen, asking them didn't they feel odd obeying orders that made no sense and why were they treating their own countrymen so badly? The atmosphere was such that I was frightened what would happen that night when there would be fewer witnesses around. So I went and made some phone-calls to human rights groups. I rang two female friends, both left-wing and very high up in Government departments (one of the many paradoxes of Colombia!). They knew immediately who to phone within other Government departments and ministries and NGO's, so that 10 minutes later, when I phoned yet another friend, a Human Rights worker, she'd already been contacted by friends in two other Government departments!

"So I could go to bed relaxed. Next day my refugee friend phoned to say

Human Rights workers from several ministries and NGO's had arrived and the police had to let the shut-out refugees in again to their families.

"Then on 3rd Feb., I joined a protest march of the refugees and was immediately taken under the wing of several very capable energetic country women from different parts of Colombia who, once they heard that we are refugees too, only wanted to help us take advantage of the few meagre Government programmes that are organized. When I mentioned our gardening projects, they were delighted. Their warmth and strength and enthusiasm made me realize that the huge refugee problem here could be turned to advantage if people could eventually go back to the countryside with a new more ecological attitude. The shake-up of losing all certainty makes people more open and willing to co-operate with one another."

Some Letters we Receive:

Ireland, 19th Dec. 1999.

Dear Mary,

When you spoke of sending me some literature, I expected a few
'green' pamphlets, not a surrealist novel!

Michael North

England, 14th Jan. 2000

Dearest Jenny,

My heart, tears and love go out to you all - keep it up - and thanks for all you do. We are all connected, issues all interlink, we are one.

Love and hugs,

Angie Zelter (Trident Ploughshares Disarmament Campaigner)

"Ideas are the keystone. They leave their mark on the landscape just as surely as chainsaws and bulldozers. Machines, after all, are only the agents of a set of ethical precepts sanctioned by the members of a particular society. The most serious form of pollution is mind pollution. Environmental reform ultimately depends on changing values."

Canadian 'Smallholder' magazine

Seeds and Tools

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At the end of January, a massive carton of seed for both hot and cold climes arrived here. It had been paid for and collected by schoolchildren in the United States. We sent the hot country seed to a project for indigenous women, widows of war violence in the Department of Putumayo. The cool country seed we are using in this area. And as always, our loyal friend Steve Thompson of Sheffield, continues to send shoe-boxes of seed donated by various seed companies he has contacted. Our needs for seed at the moment are therefore nil.

But we are very short of gardening tools: the trouble is that in Colombia, it is not possible to buy what we need: simple good-quality-metal hand-forks for the women and girls to weed with (those on sale here are obviously destined for Bogotá window-boxes and turn to chewing-gum at first contact with real earth). This is a heavy item and postage may be prohibitive, but Louise will be returning to Colombia around July - please contact Mary Kelly at Atlantis, Burtonport Co. Donegal, Ireland if you can donate old or new gardening tools of any kind: we are happy to mend or put on handles! As there are several projects in the pipeline for working with other refugees in organic gardening, this problem is going to multiply.

"Boulevard became infatuated with fertilizer. Into his compost pits he piled boughs, blood, entrails, feathers - anything he could find. He used Belgian liquor (cesspool matter), liquid manure, lye, smoked herring, seaweed and old rags. In the midst of this stench, Boulevard smiled. To those who seemed disgusted, he cried, 'But it's gold! But it's gold!'"

Gustave Flaubert, 1881 (taken from 'Organic Gardening' magazine, USA)

Colombia's Astrology Chart

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Here are some excerpts from an Astrology chart for Colombia which Anne was asked to write by one of the major Colombian newspapers:

"The year 2000 is a year of make or break. It is a time of 'people power' when each person can influence our collective destiny by making their opinion felt. This will be a year when Art and Culture will truly become vehicles for peace and forums for the discussion of how we are going to run this country in a more just and equal fashion. If we don't take this 'window of opportunity' in the sky seriously, then the force that is gathering in the people over the last few difficult years will explode in a destructive way. The year opens on a scene of worsening poverty and losses, not just here but all over the planet. This is a challenge to us all, as it means that finally we must learn to live within our means on this little planet.

We call this time a 'recession', which implies that things will get back to 'normal' sometime. Yet the stars say that things are changing radically and forever. Now Mother Earth herself is beginning to control the purse-strings and we will have to learn to live on her allowance. We have already borrowed too much that we can't pay back. It is time to learn to live simply. The good news about this difficult year is that it is a time of incredible fertility and abundance as if the earth will be saying to us: "Look how easy it is to live well."

"The Big Question this year in political astrology is whether Colombia will remain one country or whether it will be divided up. My opinion is that it will be partitioned. It contains too many divergent forces that pull in too many different directions. This is a year when the frequently tragic and sometimes hilarious human social experiment that is Colombia can begin to become a country that cares for and listens to all of its people, not just to a selected few. But to be heard, first we must speak up."

Polarization of Colombia increases

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We have news from Caqueta, now under the control of the guerrilla army while peace talks with the government take place, that the guerrilla are telling people that anyone who stays there must become part of their army as the peace talks are nonsense ... And near Icononzo, Tolima, a French biologist, a friend of the people we now live with, was also thrown out like us. The country is polarizing. Both our friend Heriberto in El Pato, Caqueta, who steadfastly continues to send us our post, and an excellent friend in Tolima who regularly phones me up, keep us in touch with news 'back home'; I also continue to keep contact with both groups of people frequently by post.

Car-free day in Bogota

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Here in Tabio, Cundinamarca, I have just returned to our now-lush gardens after a nightmarish, but very fruitful, two weeks in Bogotá where our whole group participated in the Mayor's 'Day Without Cars' on 24th February. We had to solve the problem of how to transport ourselves and lots of theatre gear from venue to venue; I looked out of the window and saw a 'rag and bone' man on his horse-drawn cart and the light shone! 22-year-old Billy spent a day in the poorest part of Bogotá chasing someone he'd known in Tolima who earned his living recycling cardboard which we needed for placards - and into the middle of posh Bogotá drove our colourful crew in a hastily decorated horse and cart. It and we were filmed, our girls sang their songs on TV, Anne and I were interviewed and the 15 or so huge anti-car, pro-bicycle banners I'd painted over a year ago were displayed with Mayoral approval along one of the central highways of Bogotá. Our young ones acted and sung and juggled and us older ones accompanied them on guitar, violin and drum. It was a beautiful day in spite of the ancient Bogotá buses still spewing out their choking poison (they weren't banned). As a result of this event, our most moving 'green' play was booked to be shown at one of the poshest universities in Bogotá and as a result of that show, we are requested to perform at many other venues and to take part in the Mayor's 'civic behaviour' campaign in Bogotá. A Kogi Indian was seen to be nodding and quietly smiling wisely to himself as he watched the play, dressed in full native costume (no, I don't think we hallucinated him, he really was there).

Meanwhile, the lady Director of Purace National Park in the South of Colombia still keeps pushing very hard for us to move there and become guardians of the park .. this is a very busy time. On March 18th there is to be performance of our Green Theatre in the Cultural Centre of Tabio . . . I think I'd better say goodbye and do some gardening quick before the next request comes through.

With love to you all,
Jenny James.

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GREEN LETTER No. 41, 2nd April 2000

The Borderlands of Purace National Park, Colombia

Physical position: The valley of the River Loro; hamlet: "El Congreso"; nearest village (many hours away): Belen; nearest (hot country) town: LA PLATA; Department: Huila (bordering on Cauca); general position: a little bit nearer the Equator than El Pato! We are several hours by bus from Neiva.

Who is here? Only myself and my 16-year-old daughter Alice.

The rest are still in Tabio, enjoying all the vegetables I grew, doing theatre and planning to move in the future. Alice and I have been here one week and we have 13 vegetable beds dug, manured and planted.

We live in an old ranch-house 15 minutes walk from the river. The valley is wide and flat with hills rising steeply on each side. And that's where the miracle comes in: most of the 300 inhabitants of this valley have agreed to conserve the forest on those hills. As Maria Teresa, the Park director who persuaded us to move here said: **"This time it is not a question of persuading the country-people to preserve their woodlands, it is a matter of rewarding them for doing so - and you are part of their reward."**

Well, I don't think most of the people who know me at close quarters would really consider me anyone's reward, but from Day 1 our relationships with local people have been gentle and good. We are on a farm that has absolutely no food supply so I immediately instituted a system of barter: people bring us gifts of tiny quantities of food and we give them packets of seeds. There are two distinct groups of people in the valley; one is a tribe of Guambiano Indians who have their own language (which they simply call 'lengua' = 'language'), the others are 'colonos' - settlers. The valley has only been open to habitation for 50 years; before that, it was jungle. Actually, there is another tribe, a very noisy one: the howler monkeys! Their chorus welcomed us immediately, a joy to our Nature-starved ears.

The flat parts of the river-valley have been cleared for cattle and beyond the mountain range is Purace National Park: where we live is considered a 'buffer zone' for the Park and therefore very important for conservation. Evidently there are about six 'predator families' amongst the population who hunt animals and cut trees with impunity, and there is illegal traffic in wood - nothing like on the devastating scale we found in El Pato, Caquetá, but I don't like to see a single block of wood awaiting transportation. The locals evidently sell a block for 7,000 pesos (approx. 3 ½ U\$) and it then resells in Neiva for 70,000! The man who has invited us to live on his 40 hectare farm wants us to teach carpentry here to make tables, chairs, windows and doors for sale to slow down the rate of tree-felling whilst still providing a living for the people. The environmental consciousness of the people here is astonishingly high - the area has obviously been a focus for much 'green' education in the past. Our function is to consolidate and extend this on the practical level with our seeds and gardens and life-style, and culturally with our theatre.

Every time I say to anyone 'If, that is, the guerrilla allow us to stay here', I am met with a dismissive gesture and remarks like 'they only come here for their holidays to fish trout in the Park.' Well, we'll see. The beauty, tranquility and potential for Life here - as well as the enormous amount of hard work involved in starting once again - are a joy to the soul and it is hard to remember this is a country involved in a savage class war. Annes's reports from Bogotá on what is suffered by other internal refugees come as a chilling reminder:

Insulting Treatment of Food-seeking Refugees in Bogota

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She writes: "I went today to collect my first 'free' bag of food which the government is supposed to supply to refugees, having waded through all the months of red-tape to get it, just to see how Colombia treats its own people. I paid for it in blood, sweat and fury at the way they are dealt with. At the end of unbelievable complications, I was told to go to a very poor, dangerous area of Bogotá and arrived at the address given to find a recycling warehouse - that is, more or less a rubbish dump. Three other refugee couples were already waiting and were, as usual, being badly treated by the people in charge who were trying to tell us they knew nothing about anyone's claim. So I gathered up the other people and we all went to a public telephone where I phoned women I know in the government 'Solidarity Network' office and complained and insisted they help not only me but speak to the others couples too.

"By the time we got back to the warehouse, the people there had received telephoned orders and we got our food in 5 minutes flat. Each of us was given 2 big sacks too heavy to carry. I lived only 8 blocks away, but the others lived several hours away. We made a deal with a rubbish collector to use his hand-cart to take us to the bus-stop and we all took turns pushing it. Then I invited them in for herb tea. They were all from Caquetá and Putumayo - "our" area. They pored over a big pictorial file of pictures and information about our community that Jenny had made and they told me their stories.

First hand stories of political violence and betrayal

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"One man showed me six bullet wounds. He had been living in the jungle when the paramilitaries arrived and shot him, leaving him for dead. He had recently been squatting with hundreds of other families in the Red Cross building in Bogotá but found the over-crowding too harrowing. After he left, he was called by other refugees to witness the finding of nearly 40 bodies on the outskirts of Bogotá. An official-looking person pretending to be a Government representative had come to the Red Cross building one day

saying they had houses for refugees. Lots of people believed him and got on the bus provided... their 'benefactors' were paramilitary murderers.

"A week ago, another three people were found dead. They'd got into a jeep outside the Red Cross building driven by a man who asked them to help him to collect food for the refugees. These people are treated like vermin by all the official bodies I've come across. The war chases them wherever they try to hide: an astrology client of mine has recently told me that his uncle runs a school which accepts refugee children and that he was receiving so many threats from the military, paramilitaries and the Guerrilla that he left a message on his answer phone saying that he 'only accepted threats between 4 - 5 p.m. as the rest of the day the telephone is occupied with more important matters'. It seems the assassins had a deadly sense of humour too: the threats were now confined to the hours of 4 - 5 p.m.

Story of a Kidnap

"That same client is a person I've only just met, though I had done his chart several times in the last year at the request of his wife, his business partners and his secretary. This was because he had been kidnapped by the FARC guerrillas in Eastern Amazonas, and was held prisoner for 4 months. I asked him if it was true what I'd seen in his chart during his absence, that he was being well-treated. 'Yes,' he said, 'very well-treated.' His captors got him the food he wanted as much as possible, he was never tied or ill-treated in any way and became friends with his guards, spending most of his time playing football or helping them bring in food supplies by mule. He said he cried a lot as he missed his wife and kids and had time to think over many mistakes he'd made. I said that many people pay more for intensive therapy courses that don't work so well! He nearly fell on the floor laughing.

"He is an extremely successful civil engineer connected intimately to many top politicians and says he now understands exactly why the guerrilla army exists and sees the injustice towards the poor. He hadn't before as he's a self-made man and put poverty down to laziness! He also told me he'd never believed in astrology before either, till his partners told him that an astrologer from Ireland had predicted he'd be free at the end of February..."

News from Caqueta

Also through Annes's work, came some unexpected news from El Pato:

"The other night one of my clients told me she'd been sent by the Ministry of Education to San Vicente del Caguan to facilitate a refresher course for the teachers of the region. Part of the week-long course included each teacher giving a discourse on their own project. A tall thin teacher stood up and talked about a 'very successful eco-project he began with the help of a group of Irish and English ecologists'. Her ears pricked up as she remembered I'd said I once lived in Caquetá. She asked him the names of the foreigners, 'Jenny and Anne and many more', he said. It was Camilo of Chorreras! He then gave an impassioned speech against the injustice of us being thrown out of the region (a brave thing to do as the whole area is now an 'independent republic' run by the FARC)." Thank you, Camilo! (*I wrote to him immediately - Jenny*)

Many of you in Europe and elsewhere may have heard of Martin von Hildebrand, the half-German nationalized Colombian who recently received the 'Alternative Nobel' prize for his work in the Amazon. His brother Patrick also works in Colombia, is a friend of Anne's and has a research station in Southern Caquetá where he has worked as a biologist for over 20 years. Anne visited him recently when he was in Bogotá and he told her that the area where he works has recently been taken over by the FARC who have formed a new front of 400-odd men. At the same time, gold has been discovered in the River Caquetá - an environmental disaster akin to petrol discovery as Mercury, a lethal element for all river life, is used to extract the gold, not to mention the 15 dredgers that have arrived to scrape the river bottom. The prospectors pay the FARC 15 million pesos a month in protection money.

Patrick tried to alert the Ministry of the Environment to get the dredging stopped, but unfortunately, as I mentioned in the last Green Letter, Juan Mayr, the Minister for the Environment, is an environmental disaster in himself. He simply told Patrick that he could do nothing, 'it was too dangerous' and 'the dredgers are owned by the mafia'.

So Patrick tried to approach the FARC and suggested an open meeting between them, the dredger owners, the biologists and the local people so that they could discuss less damaging ways to extract gold. "Good idea", said the FARC. But the next day, Patrick received a message from them to keep his mouth shut. The last Anne heard, Patrick was returning to his base, but felt it wouldn't last long. Anne fears for his life.

In circumstances like this, only pressure from abroad can really make a difference. I have asked Mary Kelly at Atlantis, Burtonport, Co. Donegal, Ireland to co-ordinate a pressure campaign from outside and we will keep you all informed via Green Letters as soon as we have more news or details.

US aided Paramilitary Violence

On my way to this quiet valley, I passed through the ghastly hot town of Cali and stayed with some acquaintances of Anne's. One was a woman from the community called 'The New Atlantis' which I mentioned in a previous Green Letter who had had to flee because of threats from paramilitaries, who are still evidently seeking them to kill them as they are 'guilty' of sheltering fleeing peasants in their farm. 'Body-heat sensitive' night-flying reconnaissance planes kindly donated by the US to worsen the war here detected the presence of more people than normal under her roof. Many of her neighbours were murdered. If the 'logic' of this Colombian barbarity escapes you, it is purely geo-political: peasants in a guerrilla area get murdered if the paras enter and vice versa. It has been going on for 50 years with varying intensity. At the moment, it is extremely intense, and will get worse now that the US has decided to put its foot in the door (to keep it wide open for their military to enter of course).

JJ Asked to teach Reichian Therapy in Popayan

I would like to end on a gentler note: havens like this green valley do still exist and there are Colombian peasants who in the midst of such barbarity have enough sensitivity left to want to preserve them. Here we will work, till Fate dictates otherwise. We are beginning once again from scratch and have nothing, except very good spirits and health. I shall be 58 in a few days' time and feel strong and ready for anything (except the noise of traffic - a week in the town of Popayan on the way here was quite enough for me). Meanwhile, life has completed one of its strange circles: for 30 years I was a therapist of the

Reichian school. The partner of Maria Teresa, the Park director who invited us here and now my very good friend, is a psychology lecturer at Popayan University and he asked me to do a talk for his students on the therapy we developed in our commune 'Atlantis'. I duly complied, though I felt myself talking through a time warp. And now I have been asked to return to run a therapeutic weekend for his mature students. I have asked for fare, food and any other help they can manage in return, to get our new Valley project underway. All the students were very interested to hear how raising one's sensitivity towards one's own feelings leads to a caring for all Nature. The group will be held on Maria Teresa's simple farm. A circle completed.

To end, we certainly need seeds now, for cool country, and just about any other help you can offer. With many thanks... now how am I going to get this letter out of this Valley...?

With love

Jenny

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GREEN LETTER No. 42 from Colombia

Parque de Puracé,

21st May 2000

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Hello Everybody!

Greetings from this wet green world at 2,000 metres where we have now lived 7 weeks. Two men from our community have joined us, and the new, slightly sad-looking garden is rapidly encircling the wooden house. Meanwhile we live on awful White food, relieved now and then by a tiny lettuce leaf or sprig of parsley. We have given away hundreds of packets of seeds to eager and grateful Indians (not the right word - but it seems to have stuck with us - blame it on Columbus!) and other settlers, mainly women: they really take food-gardening seriously in this valley.

Almost from Day 1 here, we heard the chainsaws, all day every day in the mountain ranges in front of and behind us. And on Sundays, the trundling of the wood lorry, to carry the precious wood away. I reported this to the relevant person, who informed the guerrilla - the only real hope of getting anything done about it. They promised to come and speak to the people concerned, as their policy is definitely: no felling except for necessary cabin-building or repair.

An Invitation to return to Caqueta!

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Anne reports from Bogotá that recently she attended a National Parks meeting of all the Park directors and talked at length with a man who now works in El Pato - appointed after our exile from there. He said that the Parks Department in conjunction with the guerrilla have stopped all wood-cutting and entry of wood lorries into El Pato. He was also tremendously keen that we should continue to help in that area. 'How can we?' asked Anne, 'seeing that the guerrilla banned our presence'. 'Come and do theatre at the Guayabal Cultural Festival in August!' he pleaded. It was left up to him to clear our entry with the relevant authorities... This would be a tremendous event for us, to be allowed to return and re-meet all our friends there. The area now falls within the 'government-approved' guerrilla zone, cleared of Army and Police so that the long peace-talks may proceed. There is of course bitter opposition from Colombia's right-wing to the existence of this enormous 'independent republic' and a thinly-veiled American invasion is being planned under the smoke-screen of 'drug-crop control'. There is a massive campaign, including amongst concerned people in America, for the billions of dollars being donated by the US to the Colombian Army to be used for crop-substitution and social aid to obviate the need for the peasants to grow these crops.

Revealing Snippets from the U.S. Press

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An American supporter sends fascinating little snippets from local American papers, in this case one quaintly named *The Commercial Appeal (Memphis)*, regarding Colombia. I quote: "**Republicans in Congress have warned that the US risks 'losing Colombia' to the insurgents.**" Beat that for arrogance. Were you aware that the US 'owned Colombia'? The report continues: 'Even military and law enforcement officials are concerned that the US could be dragged into a long and costly struggle that may have little impact on the drug trade.' Indeed. Because affecting the famously-lucrative drug-trade is not the aim. Anyone who

has looked properly into the matter knows that only three things will stop the human and environmental damage caused by the drug trade:

1. **Legalization**, so that the traffickers (which according to many reports include the CIA and definitely include members of the Colombian government and armed forces) lose their massive profits overnight;
2. **Social justice** for the millions of impoverished peasants who cultivate whatever will sell, obeying to the letter the cherished law of capitalism, and
3. Taking the long hard road of **changing society** so that life has more meaning and value and young people don't sink to using drugs in a futile attempt to find pleasure.

And in case anyone doubts the real intentions of the US, here we have General Fred Woerner, former commander of the US military forces in Latin America, quoted in the same Memphis journal: "Anyone who believes that these counter-narcotics battalions will not be involved in counterinsurgency is naive." Another Vietnam in the making.

And as if that news isn't alarming enough, from the same newspaper, we have this delightful news: "A debilitating fungus that attacks coca plants may become a weapon in the war on South American cocaine as the UN, Colombia and Washington near an agreement to test it on the ground in Colombia." The tests would "make sure the fungus would not harm human beings or animals and would not migrate to other crops" and would take "a year or two." But "the fungus is similar to one that commonly kills tomato plants in American gardens." I think we have been here before? ..

Organic Agriculture in Cuba and Nicaragua

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I think at this point I had better put in some good news (taken from an excellent little Canadian magazine called '**Smallholder**'): "Cuba has, of necessity, become a leader in research and development of organic agriculture methods suitable to tropical countries. The US blockade has restricted the country's access to agricultural chemicals, so the farmers have been forced to focus on chemical-free ways to fertilize crops and manage pests." Something similar happened in Nicaragua in the 80's. Organic Gardening magazine reported: "Nicaragua's ruling Sandinista Party made a commitment to clean up the country's environment and slash pesticide use. Since 1981 the country has halted the importation of lindane,

leptophos, DDT, endrin and dieldrin, all of which are banned in the US but manufactured here for export. In one year alone a programme of integrated pest management enabled Nicaragua to cut imported pesticides by 45%. Meanwhile, in neighbouring Honduras, pesticide imports *increased* by 40%”.

“Let your food be your medicine, and let your medicine be your food.” Hippocrates

“Chemical pest control, like so many of our modern practices, is a technology gone wild under the merchandising imperative.”

Organic Gardening Magazine, USA

JUAN MAYR GOES OVER THE TOP

The Colombian Lower House of Parliament got together a motion of censure against J. Mayr, Minister 'for' the Environment because of his treatment of the U'wa and other Indian tribes. Seventy-two voted against him and 59 supported him. BUT the motion was reversed in the upper house. Evidently feeling somewhat cocky, this two-legged environmental disaster has now come up with the following gem: TO PRIVATISE THE NATIONAL PARKS. This is essentially a move against the mainly very-Green Park Directors like our friend Maria Teresa Amaya. It is also noted that the 'private concern' that would take over the Parks is run by a relative of his ... The question that immediately comes to mind is: how on earth would a National Park 'make money?' By turning it into a Colombian equivalent of a Butlin's holiday camp?

SMURFIT's DIRTY WASHING

Mr. Smurfit is well-known in Ireland as a very successful businessman. He is the owner of Carton Colombia, a papermaking, pine-and-eucalyptus growing, natural-forest-destroying, Indian-murdering Colombian firm. When our campaign began in 1995, my daughter Rebecca and her Colombian friend Magdalena Lasprilla waged war in Ireland against Smurfit, using amongst other modes the simple tactic of buying a single share in the Company in order to attend shareholders' meetings and ask awkward questions. They are both very small women. They were heavied out of the meeting, and the microphones switched off to prevent them speaking. The 'bouncers' who removed them (Irishmen) threatened to '*break their legs for them*' if they continued their campaign.

By one of those strange 'chances' of Fate, a therapy patient of mine at the weekend group I ran recently in Popayan is a teacher in a school financed by Carton Colombia as part of their 'We're very Nice People Really' campaign.

Only one problem. Our informant reports, "I don't understand why, the school-house looks so pretty - it's built of treated wood - yet there is a terrible atmosphere inside." Treated wood? Alarm bells rang in Anne's head - she had just been reading about the effects of arsenic in treated wood in Organic Gardening Magazine. "What is the children's health like?" she asked quickly. "Terrible!" said our lady teacher. "They are always ill, with respiratory problems, headaches, sickness." There are several of these school buildings in the area.

We reported all this urgently to a well-placed friend who said she would find a way to acquire a sample of the wood and get it tested. She said we had to move carefully as to **'cross a multinational company here means death.'** Our original informant actually spoke well of the company, saying how grateful she was to get a job at all - but added that it was an explicit rule that any employee giving information about the company would be fired immediately.

POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST A FRIEND IN IRELAND

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To hold one's silence in Colombia is understandable, if not advisable. But to do so in Ireland we consider politically immoral. For this reason, we had to part company from a previous supporter who was engaged in anti-genetic-modification activity on a Monsanto site (longhand for pulling up contaminated beetroot!). The Irish police traced this young man via the Internet and put him through hours of interrogation including physical brutality amounting to torture. We were horrified that in this case the tactics worked: the person was silenced and would not even go to a doctor to show his injuries.

"So long as Man continues to be the ruthless exploiter of lower creatures, he will never know health and peace. So long as men massacre animals, they will kill each other. He who sows the seeds of murder and pain will never reap joy and love. "

Pythagoras, 6th Century B.C. (quoted in a Vegan Magazine)

NEWS FROM ICONONZO

Many moving responses to the news of Don Pedro's death were received from Green Letter readers; these I translated and sent to his widow. Meanwhile a chance encounter brought us the news that our farm was being doled out by the guerrilla commander who exiled us, to his local favourites. Everyone we talk to about the loss of our forests and lands in Icononzo and El Pato says that 'after the war' we will get our land back. After the war? But it has been going on for over 50 years and is not about to end. We would never go back, but we do keep insisting via the National Parks Department that these lands return to 'The Nation' one day for conservation. Maria Teresa, our Parks Director friend, is enthusiastically taking up this offer to make sure it does not get lost in some office drawer.

THE COLOMBIAN WAR

The situation here is worsening daily; the assassination of community and union leaders has been going on for decades, but now the massacre of whole communities of peasants is a regular event. The 'logic' of all this murder is popularly perceived to be 'Shut up and Survive'. Luckily there are many exceptions to this attitude: the amazing thing about Colombia is that still people come forward to take the place of their dead comrades and to carry on working. We meet so many incredible people in quiet places - this is a country of unsung heroes. Personally, the more horrors I hear of, the more determined I feel to open my mouth and speak out. Ultimately it is Silence that will kill us all. I hope you will agree and will take every opportunity to make known what is happening in Colombia.

With very best wishes from this still-peaceful valley. The reality of daily life is actually hours and hours of gardening, but it is a well-known irony of reporting that harmony and beauty and communion with Nature don't make 'news'. However, the really important work of working with Nature's laws occupies us 7 days a week, 365 days a year!

Love and thanks to all our correspondents,

Jenny James

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TRIS AND JAVIER MURDERED BY FARC MILITIA

GREEN LETTER No. 43, 6th September 2000

Dear Supporters,

This is Mary Kelly writing from our sailing boat, Atlantis Adventure in Baltimore, Co. Cork, Eire. I'm writing this Green letter at Jenny's request, as she would find it extremely difficult to write about something so close and personal.

Most of you will already know by now of the terrible tragedy that has struck our community. In early July, Tristan (18), Jenny's grandson, and his friend Javier (19) were murdered in Hoya Grande, Tolima. Tristan was about to come to Ireland to help us in our work here. He went with Javier to say goodbye to his younger brother Brendan, who lives with an adopted family near our 'lost' farm in Tolima. They

disappeared without a trace. For many days Anne was frantically trying to get news from friends in the area.

On July 28th, Louise and I were working on our boat in West Cork when we received a message to phone Anne in Icononzo. At first it seemed that Tristan and Javier had been kidnapped. Anne was moving heaven and earth trying to get information. Nobody would speak. Louise and I were worried sick. Then came an E-mail from Anne. I can hardly bear to put into writing that we know there is no hope for the boys. They were killed by FARC militia the same night that they left Brendan's house. They have been gone a month. No word of a demand for kidnap money. These boys are dead. You will have to do what we are doing - cry, mourn, disbelieve, try to take it in and then fight.

Anne writes:

Jenny phoned me from Popayan. From when she first got the news, she never believed there was any hope. She came immediately to Bogota, and we have been making things public with a vengeance ever since against the Hoya Grande FARC militia and Gonzalo, the FARC commander who threw us off our farm with threats. We have to fight like hell against the media not to let them use it to wreck the peace talks between the Government and the FARC.

Two news teams took us to Icononzo to talk to Javier's parents. These simple people were beautiful, though they have every reason to blame us for their son's death, as he begged Tris not to go to Hoya Grande where they died, but Tris was determined to see his brother, and Javier's loyalty as a friend made him go too.

We will never know what they suffered in their last moments. We will keep fighting until somehow we've done something with their deaths, though of course it is impossible to ever fill the gap. Mostly we struggle to take it in, that we will never see them again."

From Mary:

Please help us MAKE A FUSS. Pull out the stops now, and make sure you emphasise that you don't want their deaths to be used to help the Yanks justify their violence in Colombia. Over here in Ireland, Louise and I were grief stricken and horrified to imagine the obviously violent death they suffered. Completely numbed and pale from many sleepless nights, we huddled together with our small boat crew and went over and over the details and began to let in the terrible truth.

Neither Louise nor I had met Javier, who was Alice's boyfriend, but we knew from letters that he was a very fine and strong young man.

I was one of the midwives at Tristan's homebirth in Co. Donegal 18 years ago. Louise, his auntie, is exactly one year older, and shared the same birthday, April 22nd. Visiting friends and sharing the awful news was our first step in accepting their deaths.

We were visited by Telefis na Gaeilge (an Irish T.V. Station). By coincidence they were repeating for the fourth time their short documentary (in Irish) made on our farm in Caquetá 4 years ago. That night on the 6 o'clock news, they showed an interview with Louise and myself at Burtonport, and shots of Innishfree Island, Tristan's birthplace.

They told of Jenny's journey from Innisfree to Colombia with her 3 young daughters and then showed beautiful pictures of Jenny, Tristan and the rest of our group in Caqueta. In the background 'Escuchame' (*Listen to me*) was playing, a rock song written by Jenny and sung for Tristan in the mime theatre show *La Mariposa* (*The butterfly*). Through mime and music, this story tells of a city man (played by Tristan) who goes to the countryside one day and falls in love with Nature, symbolised by a beautiful butterfly (danced by Katie) who tells him that her world is being destroyed by man. Returning to the city, he struggles to tell people this truth, but is cruelly killed in his efforts to make them listen. *Escuchame* is the last recording we have of Tristan. He was one of the most talented members of our Theatre group. We will never forget his memorable shows, and we will never stop our efforts to get people to listen to the message of them.

Many old friends came to a fund-raising night held in Burtonport. Local people who remembered Tristan were so shocked and moved to inquire more deeply about the situation in Colombia. Here in Ireland, cushioned by the Celtic Tiger, people feel falsely secure and very removed from the real world. Through Tristan's death they were able to get a glimpse of Colombia's violent political situation and as Donegal borders on Northern Ireland, people were able to grasp certain similarities and the more complex details of a very dirty civil war. In every press interview we emphasised the insanity of Plan Colombia 'Americas Aid' package of 1.3 billion dollars largely destined for the Paramilitary backed Colombian Army. As Jenny recently wrote:

PLAN COLOMBIA = PLAN MASSACRE

Tristan's death moved many old friends to re-connect with us. Becky, Tristan's mother, who has been out of contact with us for some time, has returned to our group, devastated by the news. She joined us in Dublin at a vigil outside the U.S. Embassy on 30th August, the day Clinton went to clinch his deal with the corrupt politicians in Colombia. This event was organised by friends and family of Irish Priest Fr. Brendan Forde who is under death threat by the Paramilitaries in Colombia. (Louise and I knew Brendan in Ireland and actively campaigned with him against the hidden arms trade here in the not-so-Emerald Isle). In La Union, Antioquia, he has taken a courageous stand, refusing to leave the village where several local people have recently been brutally murdered. Brendan's family are campaigning hugely in Ireland and America using the situation to draw attention to the evils of Plan Colombia.

At first the organisers of the event (mainly Christian!) were uncomfortable about our strong presence outside the Embassy. We had enormous posters of Tristan saying he was murdered by the effects of U.S. violence in Colombia. Just seeing the word 'murdered' was too much for some people. We politely complied to take down the posters only because Louise and Becky were given a chance to address the public. They spoke very emotionally and very simply and many people were very moved. Louise spoke about all the positive aspects of Colombia and why it's worth fighting for such a beautiful country. She sang *Colombia Hermosa*, an incredibly moving song written by Katie (when she was 14) expressing her love for a country that has given her a beautiful life. Many people moved by this song came to sympathise with the terrible loss of two members of our group - and of course were curious as to why we had been required to take down our posters! Louise quietly mentioned this fact in the opening words of her speech.

On the evening news, we heard that Clinton (not surprisingly) was greeted with bombs as he arrived in Cartagena, Colombia!

We are asking everyone to please speak out and expose the real agenda of the U.S. Almost everyday, now, Colombia is in the Irish News.

We spoke to Jenny by telephone. She is inconsolable with grief as she brought up Tristan and watched him grow and develop into a very talented young man. We are very grateful to everyone who has helped us through this incredible time of loss, and are overwhelmed by all the kindness, love and also the donations of financial support received.

Anne and Jenny are leaving no stone unturned in the investigative work and we have heard that the FARC have arrested two men believed to be responsible for the murders (the High Command of the FARC by no means always agrees with what its militia or individual commanders do). There is much work to be done.

If any of you would have time to write to the relevant authorities asking for an investigation into the deaths, we would be very grateful.

There is no Irish Embassy in Colombia. The Embassy in Mexico is responsible for Irish Citizens, and we are pushing the Irish Authorities very hard to make enquiries and call for the recovery of the bodies.

Finally, I'd like to close with a short poem, written by Louise. Her words help ease the pain in this heaviest and darkest time within the History of Atlantis.

*Tristan is with us every moment
In a way, stronger than before.
Our love for him and each other shines so brightly
Darkness can't rule any more.
In honour of him and our children
We shall put an end to this deadly war
To change this world and make it better.
Is what we have come here for.*

Louise is returning to rejoin her family in Colombia.

Becky and I will be continuing the campaign work and supporting them from West Cork where we are restoring our old wooden boat.

With Love and Thanks

From

Mary Kelly

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LETTER FROM COLOMBIA No.44, September 1st 2000

Tabio, Cundinamarca

It happened the day after my last Green Letter. Most of you will know from Mary Kelly already. On Sunday 9th July, my grandson Tristan and my son-in-law, Javier, both 18, were murdered in Hoya Grande, Icononzo, about half an hour from where we used to live.

Tristan was about to go to Ireland and wanted to say goodbye to his half-brother who lives with a peasant family there. He did say goodbye. Javier, who is native to the Icononzo area, went to say goodbye to his parents as he had made the decision to join our community and come south with us.

I am having to write very coldly and factually, else I would never be able to write this letter at all. Anne first noticed something was wrong when the boys didn't turn up for a theatre engagement a week later. Tristan has always been one of our best actors, a very moving, natural mime artist; a conjurer, comic, dancer and acrobat, unicycle and juggling expert. Also one of the most hardworking and mature youngsters I have ever come across. For many years he was brought up in our community alongside my 3 Irish daughters, technically his 'aunties', as their brother.

Javier joined us in the moment of our forcible removal from Icononzo by the guerrilla a year ago by helping Anne get our old bus unstuck from a mud-patch. A beautiful-looking tall darkskinned boy, it didn't require a psychic to predict that he would fall for my rather gorgeous blonde daughters and they for him. This caused some internal drama and tragic soap-opera situations in our community as there were two of them and only one of him.

Now I have two teenage widows who are also young aunties who have lost their eldest nephew brought up as their brother. Of the grownups, if you can measure pain, Anne is perhaps the hardest hit, as she was deeply involved with all the children, their theatre, their welfare, their difficulties and their solutions in the five months I was away in the South setting up our new farm. It was she who gave them the OK to go to Icononzo, saying, "If anyone gives you any trouble, you just tell them I've spoken to the High Command of the guerrilla in San Vicente and that they're going to investigate why we were thrown out, because the order certainly didn't come from them."

She thought she was handing them a strong weapon. Although we may never know what really happened, this could just have been what sealed their terrible fate: that this band of guerrilla-gone-wrong got the wind up and tried to frighten us all off by murdering our kids. They dealt us an unhealable blow, but they got the wrong people if they thought this would shut us up.

When I first got the news on our new farm down south that the boys had been kidnapped, I entered an unreal world suspended in limbo. We heard Anne had gone to Icononzo to investigate. My heart and breathing had stopped; when I thought of writing to Tris to tell him how much we all loved and cared about

him, I knew I would not be writing to anyone, I could feel no-one at the other end; and I began to prepare myself for news of his death. Then when I heard Anne had returned after a week in Icononzo and after questioning the leader of the probable murderers, without the boys, I knew there was no hope. It was evening on a moonless night, we had practically no money and I was ill. I called Ned and said, "Please help me to reach Popayan" (a town 6 hours away by vehicle where we have friends who would lend money).

We set off in the muddy darkness and walked 11 hours, all through the cold wet night of the high mountains, till the first bus of day picked us up and immediately, on hearing from Ned what had just happened, agreed to take us half price to Popayan. It had been a night I will never forget. Every time exhaustion and my illness forced me to lie down (in the rain, on the road) and fitful slumber would invade me for a few moments, I would jolt immediately awake with horrible images of Tris's pale dead wounded face filling my consciousness.

It was 1.0 a.m. when I finally reached Anne in Bogota two days later. We cried together and then we began to work, phoning all through that first night every person, press agency, institution we could find awake. Until that moment, Anne had worked only privately in case there was a spark of hope of saving the boys. But her meeting with the leader of the assassins in Icononzo and his absurd and brutish lying had left her in no doubt. She was probably very near the boys' bodies as she watched him wriggle and concoct and contradict himself and attempt to threaten her.

For days, weeks, we cried, agonized, philosophied, went to hell, came back fighting, phoning always phoning: the Red Cross, the FARC HQ, the Press, the United Nations, talking on TV, on radio, to newspapers, to the Public Prosecutor, to the leaders of the Communist Party, to people on the street and on buses who recognized us from TV news programmes, to neighbours and friends and ex-friends who rallied round with love and help. There was also a tiny but startling minority of people, some of them blood relatives, who chose this moment of tragedy to display their meanest side, but the vast majority of people were breathtakingly caring and loving, including many complete strangers such as the religious lady who stopped me on the street to say, "I saw you on the telly. The Lord will bring you justice for the loss of your son." Still weakened with pain, I gasped, "I hope so" and staggered home, hanging on to my strong daughter Alice who at only 17 was like a mother to me in this situation. A little man who sells newspapers on the corner of Anne's street refused payment when she went to buy a paper with our report in it and has continued to refuse payment ever since. People we barely knew asked what they could do to help and brought us the food we asked for as Anne was so busy she had no time to work for money. Several professional people have offered us bereavement therapy, including the widow of a human rights worker, Ernesto Jesus Gonzalez, whose murder at the hands of paramilitaries was reported in an earlier Green Letter. We say yes to them all.

LEARNING TO GIVE UP HOPE

The nights were the worst. I would collapse exhausted and Anne would be left to her own private hell of self-recrimination and doubt as I fell asleep first; then I would wake at some unearthly hour to the disbelief of a new day and torture myself for several hours before Anne woke up. I gave myself the task of convincing the children and Javier's parents in Icononzo to give up hope, that hope only prolonged the inevitable agony of knowing that Tris and Javier were gone forever. It was my way of trying to believe it myself. We were powerless to help our boys, but we could help all the other people bound in terror and

silence in that region of Tolima, peasants so used to being cowed by both sides in the war, that in a sense they had actually caused our kids' deaths with their short-sighted silence over the deaths of their own people.

Don Pedro, our beloved friend, was murdered by the same gang, so was the local nurse and her husband, killed *after* Tris and Javier. Gonzalo, the brutish commander who forced us out of the area - so people say, to steal our farm - and his cohort, a peasant neighbour called Anita de Jesus Caro and her 2 delinquent sons, together with a large band of 'milicianos' using the FARC name and weapons, were running the region as a private enterprise, murdering anyone who stood in their way. Don Pedro died for opening his mouth. He told a close friend of ours in Icononzo days before he died, "If I am killed, there is only one person responsible: Anita." We are equally sure it was her who concocted pseudo-reasons to get us thrown out as she had shown hostility for our every move throughout the years. And we have every reason to believe she was implicated in instigating the murder of our boys. War always gives a moment of terrible power to embittered souls.

Gonzalo and two of the ringleaders have been hauled up by the FARC leadership for questioning. Three of the other killers have fled to Bogota. Alarm bells rang when we heard this: those fleeing FARC justice often join the opposite, truly psychopathic band of the paramilitaries. As we were by now so well-known visually through outspoken TV appearances where we committed the unforgiveable Colombian sin of **naming names**, and our girls were there on TV too, singing Katie's moving songs, we immediately set about closing down our farm in Tabio and transporting the kids to a place of relative safety.

Anne and I will remain in Bogota as there still remains an enormous amount of political and personal work to be done in the aftermath of this tragedy. Later, when we have scraped the bottom of every avenue open to us and when we have gathered together the necessary *pesos*, we will all move south for a period of recovery on our (for now) peaceful farm near Purace National Park.

ANNE VISITS THE FARC HIGH COMMAND

Anne returned for a second visit to San Vicente del Caguan, HQ of the FARC guerrillas, to talk to the commander of the Tolima area, Adan Izquierdo. She reported him to be a serious, attentive, concerned man who guaranteed us both a thorough investigation and fully supported our return to Hoya Grande to seek what I never want to find: the boys' bodies.

One week after this meeting, to Anne's disbelief, she saw on the TV news that Adan Izquierdo had been killed in an accident in the '*Zona de Despeje*' - the large demilitarized zone run by the FARC while the slow peace talks take place with the Government. She phoned the High Comand (on a free line provided by the Government - farce continues to rule in Colombia) and was told that **Alfonso Cano**, Number One after the now very old FARC founder, Marulanda, would now be in charge of our case. Alfonso Cano is someone that even many of those opposed to the FARC cannot help respecting.

Going through Tris's Possessions and Saying Goodbye

Now, on Sept. 1st and about to leave Tabio for the second time, I am endeavouring to bring on the future, something I thought I could never find the strength or meaning to do. I have gone through Tristan's clothes, found his books in Spanish on marine engineering, astral navigation and sea-diving which he was studying to be a useful member of our sailing boat team in Ireland. I have looked at his book on mime,

which he hardly needed, given his natural talent. I have noted the immaculate way he kept his possessions (the other kids are scruffy little devils), I have seen his queer spelling (academic subjects did not come easily to him), I have given away his possessions to those most deserving, I have slept under his duvet and I have called his name out loud when alone in helpless desperation; I have agonized a hundred times, as have we all, over the terror the boys must have felt when they realized they were trapped by murderous lunatics; I have tortured myself over the morality of having the kids here in the first place and I have wept over Katie's unfinished song about him. She can get no further than the line: "I will never forgive the years they stole from you." Nor will any of us.

Tris is recorded many times on tape and theatre videos. I am edging towards a plan for continuing our artistic work without him, which at first I thought we could never bear to do: by creating a whole new theatre dedicated to him, using a background screen of him larger than life - which he now is - while the rest of the youngsters sing, dance and relate to him on stage. Without this acknowledgement, we cannot move forward.

A couple of the youngest kids and our one remaining Colombian boy will go to Ireland; the rest of us are opting to stay in Colombia through the war ahead and to go where we are most needed: to the area the Americans in their infinite arrogance and stupidity are about to attack: the *'Zona de Despeje'*, where they are using the excuse of their fictitious 'war on drugs' to re-arm the corrupt Colombian Army, backed by totally ruthless paramilitaries, to seek and destroy the peasant army (the FARC) and, of course, an indiscriminate number of peasants who just happen to be in the way. The paradox of the Colombian situation is that for all its hideous mistakes (like allowing too much local power to commanders so that a monster like Gonzalo can cause havoc), and in spite of our terrible personal grief, the FARC is the only force in Colombia that we know of that is seriously capable of bringing about a vital radical change. The irony of our situation will invite disbelief: we have lost two farms and forest reserves and now two cherished young men to maverick FARC commanders. And yet we are thinking of accepting their serious and repeated request to go and help them with drug-crop substitution and organic and ecological agriculture, on the basis of them bringing full justice in our case, plus our respect for the serious nature of their leaders which is in stark contrast to the brainless gunmen we – but most especially Tris and Javier - had the misfortune to cross at local level.

Each young person in our community will have a choice to return to the relative safety of Europe, or to continue the work we have started in this desperate country. On television, we were asked time after time: will you all be leaving Colombia now? We answered: "No, our children's blood on this land ties us to this country more than ever before."

When all the sharp and crippling pain of a new and violent death has dulled just a little, the mind's clouds begin to clear. We know Tristan wanted to live, to find a girlfriend, to go to Ireland to seek his roots; he cared not one whit for politics, he hated the FARC; and he frequently disagreed with his granny's choices. He was careful, conservative and materialistic. We were absolutely respectful of his differences and were doing our all to facilitate his return to Ireland. Several people, including Javier's parents, the adoptive parents of Tris' half-brother called Julio and Baudelina, and our friend Gilberto, who sheltered us for many weeks near Icononzo when we were forced to leave our own farm, - all of them the last people to see the boys alive and happy – had all begged Tris not to go out that fatal night, begged him to wait at least till light of day. Even Javier said they shouldn't go. But Tris was a Taurus, strong, stubborn and determined

and, like so many other boys of his age, he walked himself and his friend into a sudden, horrific, senseless death.

Private Agony and Public Action

We have all died with our boys, over and over again. But now we must live. And living for those of us left in this tiny community means recycling even the lads' deaths. We have an incredibly strong weapon in our hands: we are known now throughout Colombia, we are marked forever. We have instant access to the media. A single phone-call can get us an interview on TV. The FARC are bending over backwards to see justice done. They are well aware that had we chosen to, we could have handed the British and American governments an immediate excuse to get even more aggressive in their intervention. It seems hideous to talk in a utilitarian fashion about the deaths of our kids - but what exactly is the alternative? To sob in private, agonize in a private hell forever; flee Colombia, avoid reading all future news of the country we love and end up in useless limbo. This is what many frightened Colombians have done. And the killing goes on, and so does the silence.

Tris, forgive us. We were not there to save you, to stand in front of your self-appointed executioners and say: 'You'll have to kill us first, you shortsighted cowards.' We let you go off on your young man's adventure, and like many a young mountaineer, motorcyclist or soldier, you were cut down before you began to live. And now your strange grandmother who never could give you all you needed, and your talented little aunts, and your carers and helpers amongst the grownups, are going to work with those whom the black and white media would love to label the Devils in this story, to try and bring some sense to this chaotic war.

Colombia is more diverse than the US Government mind. The truth of this country is subtle, sophisticated, ever surprising, deep and hopeful amidst all the death and destruction. And so, Tris, we are choosing to continue to walk into the eye of the hurricane to honour you, your sacrifice, and our chosen path.

I would like to end with the last words from Khalil Gibran's 'The Prophet':

'A little while, a moment of rest upon the wind, and another woman shall bear me.'

I don't really believe this Tris; I tend to think hopeless Hope has created all religions. But I want to, Tris, I want to.

Our love to you and Javier forever,

Jenny

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GREEN LETTER No. 45, 29th September 2000

Dear friends and loved ones in Ireland, England and elsewhere.

Calling you all by writing frequently, sharing, talking with everyone we meet, is our only consolation. The boys died all over again for us when finally a week ago we heard an eye-witness account of the mind-numbing horrific way they were slaughtered: in a macabre twisted 'public trial' attended by terrorized villagers who had known Tristan all his life. "These are the bastards who bring strangers to our area," was the accusation by the drunken ringleaders. Tristan and Javier had their hands tied. It was night-time. One woman called out, "No, don't kill him, he grew up here," but they swore at her and threatened her to silence. Tristan was killed first, his throat slit. Then his head cut off. Javier had to see that. Then he died the same way. Then their bodies were soaked with petrol and burned to leave no trace.

I write this mechanically, like a zombie, watching these words appear on the screen. When Anne first phoned this news through, I nearly blacked out and lay shuddering and sobbing on the bed, holding bunches of young sobbing girls in my arms. Rafael, who went on Tristan's second-to-last journey, their first holiday, to Northern Colombia recently, took longer to understand as we were speaking English and he is a black Colombian. Then he too collapsed. It could easily have been him that accompanied Tristan, instead of Javier.

The FARC have executed the two ringleaders but the three who actually performed the hideous killing (where on earth did they find the adrenaline to kill two beautiful boys?) are still hiding in Bogotá. And presumably the commander, Gonzalo, who initiated this barbaric nonsense, is still free. As I write, Anne is in San Vicente, the guerrilla HQ, doing a 'sit-in' until getting further justice done. She has been there 10 days so far; it is not unwillingness on the part of the FARC, but the fact that they are on the verge of a worsened war because of the threatened American invasion, that is causing the delay. We have made the decision that even if Anne is unsuccessful in getting an armed escort, we women and girls will go back to where Tris and Javier died in any case, to talk to everyone and erect a stone where they died, also and most importantly to share our grief with Javier's parents who live in a hamlet nearby.

This must all seem totally unreal to my European readers. It seems unreal to us right here in Colombia. The sun still shines, the chickens run round, we eat dinner, the girls sing, we do theatre, we wash up and go to sleep and wake up again to The Knowledge. We walk past the huge photos of Tristan (we have none of Javier - I hardly knew him) on the wall; he smiles out gently at us. There is no future, just an everlasting present of absorption, disbelief, private and public tears, moments of laughter perhaps when I recall some amusing act of Tris (a great piss-taking comedian); and we miss, not only Tris and Javier, but our peasant life in the deep countryside. We are living on a farm akin to a posh English park with the kindest landlord of all time who cries and shares with us. Until we can put this matter to rest, we cannot return to our home near Puracé National Park, though one by one, as a few pesos are earned we send the children there to join the others who are growing our future food.

Sharing Grief with Strangers

Once again, we are preparing and composting a huge garden, though the food we have planted will not be for us. And our theatre work continues, not by choice - we have no heart for it - but to pay for our journey here by working for the candidate for Mayor who lent his vehicles. He and a 'green' councillor of his visited us one day, the girls sang a couple of moving songs, we talked of the deaths -and the next moment the councillor was crying in my arms, for he too had lost a young brother, murdered, a couple of years back ... Some days later, after performing a fairly sophisticated little programme (considering there are only 6 of us left from our original theatre crew) in an old people's home just hours after hearing the final grisly news about our boys, we were talking to the head nurse as we redressed in the toilets, feeling stunned by the images in our heads. She was in tears telling of atrocities she had been forced to witness and expressing her gratitude for our theatre show. She kept repeating, "Thank you so much for living in Colombia and please never leave. Remember that not all of us are violent." That particular day, few of us could be counted amongst the non-violent. Even 15 year-old Katie, the sunniest soul imaginable, said she would happily kill. This kind of violence makes potential killers of all of us, though for myself, I would prefer that the murderers had to live for ever seeing and feeling and being faced with what they have done and its effect, not only on the dead, but on all who loved them. A vain and pointless phantasy.

Irish Ambassador Comes from Mexico to Visit Us

The Irish Ambassador in Mexico - Ireland's nearest Embassy - kindly came to Colombia and visited Anne. He most astonishingly made the following request: that if there are ever any further tragedies involving Irish people in Colombia, could he ask for our help as he and the Red Cross people were in agreement that in terms of contacts and investigations, we had moved our case quicker than any diplomatic channels ever could! The rest of his comments, though absolutely confidential, show a very human man and a fine antidote to the icy, hostile and arrogant phone-call I had from the British Ambassador in the early days of our agony.

Tris's Last Letter

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While clearing out the very last of Tristan's little private belongings here in Pacho, I came across the last letter he wrote home in April while staying on an island on Colombia's north coast. Although brought up vegetarian, he and Rafa had been forced through hunger to accept work with fishermen. Tris writes:

“Today a fisherman caught a turtle. It was such a beautiful gigantic thing and they killed it. It makes me feel like never fishing again in my life.

"The fishermen chuck all their plastic bags all over the place and it goes into the sea. I pick up bags of this rubbish and take it to the mainland.

“One day we were crossing a road when we heard a crash and it was a motorbike and a small bus; of course the man on the motorbike was the most hurt. It was such a horrible feeling to think that these things happen all the time ... Sometimes I feel fed up when I'm tired and hungry and hot ... adventures are not easy and not always good fun...”

What shall grow of this?

We do not know

Great mystery

Great pain

The Reaper sows

Something grows

(sent by Karin Schnurpfeil of Germany)

The letters, cards, condolences and some practical help we have received have been our lifeline: I thank you all for the therapy you have given me. I know that in Europe and America in recent years there has been a lot written on bereavement therapies and if any

of you would like to send articles or books you may have come across, we would be hugely grateful. It is a subject that will be in great demand in this wartorn country and in my own therapeutic work with other people if ever I become a fully functional human being again...

**Where death appears to be
A central certainty,
There is another door opening,
Another dawn, another spring,
Another song .**

(found in Organic Gardening magazine)

How to step forwards into a Green future, we really don't know, though we keep working mechanically all the time. And each evening, we meet together with Jose, our generous benefactor who has given us his farm as refuge and a place of mental convalescence... and Katie's songs flow...

Its hard to believe/It seems impossible/to get it into my mind/and say goodbye/to the last hope... But your death won't hide behind silence/ I've had enough of death and violence.... How can they not feel/how can they kill/and then live on/as if nothing is wrong? ..

And I read poems we have written in the past and poems sent by our helpers, and strange words found in old books ...

**And they said, with gentle voices:
We are ghosts of the departed,
Souls of those who once were with you.
Cries of grief and lamentation
Reach us in the Blessed Islands;
Cries of anguish from the living,
Calling back their friends departed,
Sadden us with useless sorrow.
Therefore have we come to try you
... Speak of it to all the people,
That henceforward and for ever
They no more with lamentations
Sadden the souls of the departed**

**In the Islands of the Blessed
Do not lay such heavy burdens
In the graves of those you bury ..**

(from The Song of Hiawatha by H.W. Longfellow).

It is true, Tris and Javier, that I feel scared to move on, scared to be alive and to live for the Living, as if to do that is to betray you and your immense fear and pain in those last terrible moments. To do so is to admit you really have gone, the human race really is capable of such barbarism, it really did happen - and we weren't there to protect you. Facing this is the Task before us.

Jenny.

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Local peasants ordered to kill us

Trying to crawl out of the cesspit of Mourning

LETTER FROM COLOMBIA No. 46, 27th October 2000

Pacho, Cundinamarca, Colombia

The nightmare does not subside, but deepens, worsens. An English reporter went with Anne to Icononzo; he was willing to go with her to Hoya Grande, where our boys were killed. But she was met with the stunning news that the LEADERS OF THE MURDERING GANG ARE BACK THERE and have declared war on our commune. So the supposition they were executed by the FARC was wishful thinking on the part of our informants when the two militia-men were taken away for questioning.

Anne was also told more of those little details that put us in Hell for more days and nights on end: that Tris and Javier saw the thugs approaching and ran into the middle of the village and on to a football pitch where a match was in progress. The 'brave' footballers

quickly cleared aside - and the murderers caught Tris and Javier. and tied them up. Such information transforms us temporarily into frustrated mass murderers...

Tris and Javier were taken to a room. We will probably never know what happened there. Then out and further down the road. Tris was crying. Then his crying was silenced forever.. Javier instinctively reacted in a movement, hopeless, to save his friend, and was slain in like manner..

Our reporter friend hypothesizes logically that as Tris was well known and the accusation of spies is a ludicrous excuse, the real reason was probably alarm on the part of the gang at Tris discovering that they had parceled out our land and were charging rent for it. It would be absolutely in keeping with Colombian mentality, because of the massive poverty, to kill for money - it happens all the time, for just a few pesos. They also stole the pathetic 50,000 pesos (just enough for their busfares) that the boys had on them at the time.

Murder's OK in Colombia..

I was once on a Bogota bus when a man got on to ask the passengers for money. He declared that he was just out of jail, "but it's alright," he said, as if to reassure everyone, "it wasn't for thieving." I blankly wondered what would follow, then my mind eclipsed as I heard words I would never forget. Coolly he said, "It was for homicide." There wasn't a flicker of a reaction on the bus.

Anne also heard that the Sanabria brothers, two of the murderers, are in La Modelo, one of Bogota's main prisons. But not for the murder of our boys - for another crime. She quickly went back to Bogota to make an official statement and was told the authorities would do their best to engineer a face-to-face confrontation for her with the men, in the Governor's office. The trouble is, eye-witnesses to the murders will never dare speak to the authorities, and Anne can prove nothing.

Anne goes to meet regional FARC leaders

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After trying to come to terms with the horror of what the boys went through, the worst news for me is that the FARC ACTUALLY LET THOSE MEN GO. This is a whole new ball-game with far-reaching implications. Anne at this moment, on the previous advice of the FARC high command, has gone to the Planadas area to meet the commander of the Bloque Central which takes in Tolima. Planadas is precisely the place we - with Tris - were doing many theatre performances in August 1999 when we heard of our enforced removal from

Tolima. . we have dozens of friends there who phoned me up in sorrow after they had seen our tragic news announced on TV. With Anne went 15 year old Laura and her guitar to sing Katie's latest heart-gripping songs about death and silence and fear.. and the need for a huge change in Colombia.

It now remains to be seen what attitude the Central Block of the FARC take - because if they stand by, for reasons unimaginable, their freeing of our boys' murderers, I am afraid WE will have to declare war on the FARC. The sequel to this will have to come in another Letter when Anne returns from Planadas.

Details of Another Murder: Eduardo Rincon's

Recently when Anne was in San Vincente, she finally discovered the WHY and the WHO of another murder in our lives: that of Eduardo Rincon, our friend the Green councilor in El Pato - also killed by his throat being slit, but we were never sure which side did it.

I am becoming accustomed to the ghastliness: it was the FARC, specifically, a killing ordered by a commander called Julian for the most despicable of reasons: that Eduardo was about to disclose a corruption scandal going on in the San Vincente council. The councillors who were involved in it told the FARC who also had some kind of cut in the shady dealings of Eduardo's 'interference' - and so Eduardo lost his life for being straight. That same Comandante, it turns out, also ordered the death of my friend, the local Caqueta FARC commander Enrique, who used to support our environmental work. Enrique was executed for trying to escape from the FARC, taking a lot of their money with him.

Lots of bad news about the FARC

The next part of the story leaves an old-time left-winger like myself with very little to hang on to: whilst Anne was in the guerrilla HQ town of San Vincente, this same Commander Julian suddenly disappeared, taking with him several sack-loads containing thousands of ill-gotten dollars of FARC money. He was extremely high up in the command structure, evidently a friend of the famous hard-liner Mono Jojoy. I hate the cynics being right. I have wanted to believe and I still want to. But Tris's death will now leave us no alternative but to dig to the bottom of this cesspit.

WE ARE TOLD TO LEAVE OUR FARM FOR THE THIRD TIME

It does not end. A week ago I received another debilitating blow: a phone call from a loyal woman friend in Popayan saying Ned (our man holding the fort at our farm in Purace) had phoned her urgently to say the FARC down there had TOLD OUR PEOPLE TO LEAVE. This would be almost funny if it didn't come in the middle of a hideous tragedy. This

particular order to leave, our third, hit me harder than the other two. We need some kind of security while our lengthy investigations into the boys' murders take place. The lovely new farm and gardens we have on the edge of Purace National Park and which we have spent months of hard labour working on, are this for me.

However, unluckily for the new brutish commander of the area, at the very moment of his order, Anne happened to be talking to his higher commanders in San Vincente. She was contacted, stormed into a meeting of the High Command to complain, and probably the quickest reversal of an order in FARC history then occurred.

But I did not feel better. The very fact that it had happened was enough for me. And then, days later, I got details of the event from Ned. No wonder I hadn't felt better:

The commander had called a meeting of all the local people and was ranting about us gringos being in HIS area and said that if we did not leave, the people should kill us and bury us and plant banana palms on top of us...

Ned's latest reports are that after receiving the message from the top, the commander retracted his order and is now very friendly.. He is also, like all the FARC, very hot on green matters. Nice that the FARC care so much about TREES.

Hauling Ourselves out of the Cesspit

I am thinking maybe this letter comes across as speedy and glib, given its subject matter. This is because, after endless days and nights of the blackest pit of the soul, I simply had to force myself up and out, down to the freshly rained-upon garden, then into the long music-playing sessions with Katie, reading of other tragedies like last century's history of Ireland - anything, to bring myself back into a functioning world, to be active, to break out of the cycle of vivid pictures of the boys' terror and hopeless horror. People's very beautiful letters have helped so much. Some are religious or spiritual, I don't mind, I need everyone; all are human, hugely generous, massively comforting. Here is just one quote sent to me by a lady acupuncturist I have never met, Annie Hlbert:

Death is nothing at all. I have only slipped away into the next room... Whatever we were to each other, that we are still. Call me by my old familiar name, speak to me in the easy way which you always used. Put no difference in your tone, wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow. Laugh, as we always laughed, at the little jokes we enjoyed together. Play, smile, think of me... Let my name be ever the household word that it always was. Let it be spoken without effect, without trace of shadow on

it. Life means all that it ever meant, it is the same as it ever was, there is unbroken continuity... Why should I be put out of mind because I am out of sight? I am waiting for you.. somewhere very near, just around the corner.

Oh, Tris, I am far far from this kind of calm. The way you and Javier died prevents it, for a very long time.

Dear people, keep writing; never think your words can't help, can't heal. They do, they can. We need you. Also we need to keep the practical side of our lives going and are completely out of seed for our gardens. We would be very grateful to receive seed at this time. We have to keep on living the lives that Tris and Javier loved. But how the horror will heal, I do not know.

With love to you all, and to them, forever.

Jenny James.

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LETTER FROM COLOMBIA No.47, 14th November 2000

Pacho, Cundinamarca,, Colombia.

There is something about the deaths of our two boys, Tristan and Javier, that brings out the most beautiful and most shameful in people. Struggling daily - and nightly - to come to terms with our loss, we are suddenly having to cope with a psychic nuclear war from the most unexpected of quarters: the British Press.

Having left England in 1975, I am deeply shocked at the degradation of reporting - and some reporters - there. It seems that the mere fact of living in a community or tribe rather than in a neatly-boxed nuclear family, arouses the wildest of fantasies, that the fact we began as a therapeutic community is somehow a heinous crime - and that the hideous murders of two innocent lads are some kind of punishment for daring to step outside the urban consumerist norm, and most definitely signal the final demise of our group. If anyone in England has been disturbed, puzzled, or baffled by the lurid content of some of these articles, we will be more than happy to correspond at length on any issue and will not be in the least offended by your honest (and natural!) curiosity.

Here is what Anne has replied to quite the most sadistic and vampiric of all the papers: the 'respectable', English Independent (whose unhealthy reporter Andrew Brown we had the misfortune to give hospitality to in the early 90s):

"I would like to express my sincere thanks to Mary Braid, Jan McGirk and most especially to Andrew Brown for removing any last vestiges of doubt I may have harboured regarding my choice of country – Colombia. The extremely arrogant, uncompassionate, bitchy, untruthful (full of downright inventions and lies in many parts), unprofessional and hate-filled articles these journalists wrote, taking advantage of the tragedy of the brutal murders of our boys to vent their venom (especially Andrew Brown) has brought it home to me that there are worse forms of violence than guns and machetes in the hands of psychopaths.

"Since the deaths of our boys, we have constantly questioned whether we should stay in Colombia or not, giving all our kids the choice of going back to Ireland if they want to. Few have chosen that option and it seems that their instincts are 100% correct if those journalists are representative of the prevalent mentality in Britain. Let us hope that that kind of vampirism, feeding off the pain of a very frank and open group of people at an excruciatingly vulnerable moment in our lives, was an unfortunate accident on the part of the editorial staff of the Independent. Or perhaps I simply didn't realize that the Independent is part of the gutter press, in which case I apologise for having bothered you with intelligent criticism.

In case anyone up there is interested in reality, we are about to go back to Icononzo, with guarantees of security from the FARC. If there are any journalists connected to the Independent with the mental capacity to live up to its name, they would be most welcome to come along and witness our attempt to create a new, more human way of dealing with the violence and pain caused by such horrific but commonplace brutality." *Anne Barr*

Our Plan (by Anne)

We plan to go into the village where the boys were killed between 2nd-4th December. Four members of the Atlantis Community will be returning to Hoya Grande where, on 9th July two of our young men were cruelly murdered... We plan to use all the many decades of experience we have in creative confrontational encounter group therapy, theatre and music to clear up and clean up the blackness,

trauma, fear and violence left in us by the murders of our lads and the unpublicized murders of many more local people by the same group of psychopaths. We are inviting the Press to be our bodyguards and to witness what we hope will be powerful but peaceful forms of protest and psychological vengeance. We will be asking the local people to talk openly about what happened to our boys instead of swallowing what they had to witness so that it will have to come out in other more twisted ways later.

We will be asking the impossible, for whilst we are foreigners and therefore slightly more protected by the media and the institutions, our *campesino* friends have to live amongst the murderers and their families and accomplices. However, the nightmare that is Colombia begs impossible solutions. Certainly the USA and its Plan: Massacre Colombians and Poison the Forests and Rivers, and the inert Colombian government who could have solved the whole conflict easily with a few simple social reforms, are not offering anything except escalation, whilst the FARC are too busy fighting off the US-backed paramilitary death-squads to be of much use to the civilian population and have in many areas made things worse by arming the kind of brain-dead psychopaths that killed our boys, in a chaotic attempt to protect local people from the same paramilitaries.

We do not know what will be the outcome of this plan, we only know that not to take the risks implied would be to kill our boys all over again with our silence.

Some Journalists are a little different

Some journalists who have visited us here in Colombia or talked to Mary and Louise in Ireland have been extremely human, notably Karl Penhaul, an English journalist who had to leave Reuters for 'getting too close to the truth in Colombia'. His report was NOT printed by The Times because the story was "OLD". We heard that Mick Clifford of the Irish Sunday Tribune was also most fair. And Anne is corresponding with another English journalist who visited us, Jason, who whilst sharing the cynicism of his profession, has been very open and communicative. Here is an excerpt from a letter of Anne's to him:

Yet Another Journey to the FARC

"Laura (Mary Kelly's 15 year old daughter) and I went to seek the command of the 25th Front of the FARC which is supposed to control the area where our lads died. After several days' journey and much help from other commanders, we found Comandante Tito in the mountains of Tolima. He totally shocked me by telling me that Gonzalo, the brute commander responsible for our exile and, we suspect, for Tris and Javier's deaths, had been *promoted* and was now head of the Front, along with Tito and one other man. It now became clear that the chief murderers had been freed from FARC custody and were back in Hoya Grande through intercession from Gonzalo - a sure sign of his guilt.

“Tito promised a full investigation; he was a good man, but obviously limited by the internal politics of his army and by the stresses of being forced into a full-scale war by the United States’ Plan (Anti-) Colombia. I told him that we plan to go back to Hoya Grande and, as I put it, sit on the football pitch where the boys ran to beg for help from the locals playing football when their murderers were chasing them with machetes. The "brave" footballers dispersed in panic leaving them to their awful fate. I said we'd sit there and send out a challenge to see how brave the murderers really are. His eyes opened wide in amazement. I don't think he'd ever heard of non-violent confrontation.

Combatting the Conspiracy of Silence

“What we actually plan to do, insofar as we can plan such a risky and unpredictable event, is simply to use all our many decades of experience in running intensive encounter groups almost daily in the attempt to sort out the violence that each of us carries inside us, the heritage of the destructive culture that we came from. Before we came to South America, we were aware that we’d have to face a different kind of violence here, more up front and more physically dangerous than the European variety. We knew it and accepted it in theory - the reality has been harder. Yet it is a violent reality that a lot of people in the Falls Road or the Creggan Estate or in Yugoslavia, as well as practically any poor part of Colombia, know well.

“It is true, as some of the sensationalist English papers have said in their own twisted fashion, that we have been shaken out of our European middle-class dream-world, but our response is different from anything they could possibly imagine. We accept the cosmic kick up the posterior, excruciatingly painful though it will continue to be for years to come. But we do not accept the gratuitous stupid violence done to two beautiful young men. We have fought openly (an unthinkable strategy in fear-ruled Colombia) since the very beginning against the elements of the FARC that caused our boys' deaths. We have won the respect of the higher command of the guerrilla movement, just as we have won the respect of the right-wing media here and of the people who run the government institutions. (The Attorney General of the country has promised me access those of the assassins who are in prison). Now we intend to win the respect of the murderers themselves and of the local people who have been paralysed by fear of them and who let our boys die. As one of our best friends there, a former leader of the village and himself exiled by the same gang for speaking out, said to me on my last visit to Icononzo: *"You have to get rid of these people for us. We can't, but you can."*

“As all relatives of murder victims must know, neither the death sentence nor life imprisonment can ever satisfy or heal the anger and sadness that such hatefulness leaves behind. We are looking for a new way, and I suppose we'll have to invent it . In Hoya Grande, we will talk, sing, do theatre, knock on the doors of the murderers and their accomplices and their families, talk to their kids, rescue our boys’ remains (we have been told where they are

buried), bury them properly and erect a carved wooden headstone and plant a garden of flowers around it. We have lived our lives always according to the natural law of recycling all the physical and emotional excrement that we produce and have successfully built a beautiful lifestyle from it. Now we are faced with the greatest challenge ever, the recycling of the nightmare deaths of our loved ones” **Anne**

Louise’s Dream of Tris

My dancing daughter Louise, now 19, sent us this dream of hers from Ireland:

“I dreamt of me and Tristan running away from his murderers. We are still kids in the dream, which starts off lovely and sunny, a carefree feeling, but suddenly running away from the murderers isn't just a game of chase, it's for real. We know we are going to be caught, and it gets more and more terrifying. Suddenly Tristan stops and says: "Look, I can run faster than you. You just hide and I'll make sure they only follow me." I say to him: "No, you hide and I'll make them follow me!" We get very angry with one another, both trying to be the bravest one. We are losing time and I'm panicking, but Tristan looks at me calmly (I'm pregnant in the dream) and says: "You are worth two lives, and you are connected to many people closely. I'm just one life, on my own." I look at him and he has gone white and he is trembling, but he tries to smile, and I think, "Oh no, he doesn't know what he's in for." He looks like a little kid, but then a feeling of arrogance comes off him as he turns away and continues running down the path.

“What he really wanted to do was hug me and hide with me. I wanted that too, but he went too soon. I let him go and I felt terrible. I never see him being killed, I just feel terrible and responsible, as if he is a kid that I didn't look after.

“Then I just see everyone's shocked faces, white with anger and fear. I see you Jenny and Katie, Alice, Laura, Ned, Anne and Fin and many faces that I don't know, and I ask everyone why? why? why was he killed? but no-one answers, no-one knows the answer. There is no answer.”

Remembering Javier

Javier had lived with us less than a year, so some of us didn't know him very well. Ned has written us these recollections of him from our Puracé farm where he is looking after the children and growing our future food:

“I spent a few days alone with Javier in Tabio once when everyone was doing theatre in Bogota and I liked him a lot. I appreciated his totally open irrational insecurity about wanting any kind of news of Katie and Alice (he was in love with both of them!) who had only gone for a few days, and he walked hours to our other farm in Tabio and back again to see if Alex had

heard anything about them. He was always energetically dependant, always fascinated by any kind of emotional energy, even if it was a row. All the other kids would look the other way and disappear when I was having trouble with anyone, but Javier would ask questions and make fun and laugh.

“Although he was tall and strong, he had skinny legs which, whenever I saw them, would remind me of his poor *campesino* background, having to work picking coffee when he was a child and being hit and afraid of his parents, and scared of the army and the guerrilla chasing each other. He told me all this. Later he was brought up in a town and looked down on *campesino* work and would even make a detour round Tabio rather than be seen carrying a hoe! But that didn't stop him working when it was needed. We used to have to carry water up to the house, up an impossible slope, in 20-litre containers and it would half kill us. But he would tie two together and come up at a trot, despite his skinny legs, pouring with sweat. He was like that about everything - cutting firewood and so on. He was always by far the fastest if anyone had to go down to town to get something. He was taking on our bus repair work much more seriously than the other lads did and was going to be our driver.

“He was eagerly learning everything, the guitar, about himself, theatre, despite problems; he'd started to be the conjurer in our theatre when I left for the Purace farm and was very nervous about it he said. But he looked brilliant, and would laugh constantly.” *From Ned*

Javier, you said you'd joined our tribe to change your life, and you meant it. Our sorrow and pain go with you forever.

For Our Boys, from Jenny

“Issues of karma, destiny, meaning, guilt
Shattered philosophies, our self-confidence in shreds
Utter disbelief ruling all
Sharing over and over and over again your last shocking hours
Tracing your innocent footsteps.
Betrayal, cowardice, unthinkable brutality
Mind-numbing injustice
Just another death called Tris
Just another Colombian called Javier
On and on, month after month
Our minds seeking refuge
But nowhere to hide
Like our boys that night.
Eyes closed, my hands reach up
Remoulding your face

Remodelling your soft white skin
Smoothing it carefully around the strong bones of your face
Laughing at you for your obsessively short hair
Watching your cheeky grin
Smiling at your even cheekier words
You are tall now, taller than me.
I saw you born,
We all helped Becky that night in her agony
Guitars softly playing
Firelight flickering
The Island winds blowing
The midwife sleeping
As we watched on and on through the long night
Till, just as dawn broke
Becky's agonised cries
Announced your quiet birth.
We received your blood-covered head in our hands
And a boy was born.
I, your grandmother, but still with milk
From my own year-old baby Lou
I took you to my breast
And while your young mother recovered
I gave you your first feed
And comforted you.

Tris, now your blood-covered head
After only 18 short years
Will haunt us forever
And this time no-one there to receive you
No-one to comfort you.
Tris, in those last moments, you were a baby again
Ripped in pain from a beautiful and a nightmare world
Needing us.
Now we need you
To bathe you and heal you
In the wells of love
Bursting from us.
Tris, a proud young man
Finding your own path
Walking unsuspecting to your death
Your loyal friend Javier beside you
In Hoya Grande, Tolima
On 9th July in the year 2000.
Tris and Javier, our love and agony go with you forever.

I will end with some bizarre good news: Ned reports from Puracé that the FARC commander wants to GIVE us the farm we are living on, and says, "If you need more land, just let me know." Oh, Colombia.

Thank you to all our friends for sharing these times with us.

Jenny James.

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A message from Tris..

LETTER No. 48 from COLOMBIA , December 26th 2000

Bogota

Hello good people and many thanks for all the moving and inspiring letters we have received after the murder of our boys. These have meant the world to us.

Louise Comes Home

On the last day of November, my 19 year old daughter Louise came home from 2 years away in Ireland helping Mary with campaigning there during which time she became a professional dancer so that our rustic theatre can move to a different level. I took one look at the nervous upset state she was in and decided this was definitely not the time for the whole group to go on the planned mission to Icononzo, where we would be stepping into the unknown.

Ned Goes to Icononzo and Reports Back

So instead, Ned, who is usually the behind-the-scenes pillar of stability on our farm, came up from Purace and went into the front line of battle, going alone to Icononzo. His first news confirmed that the time is definitely not ripe for the whole group to demonstrate there, as there is much more work to be done: first, as earlier reported, two of the murderers were freed by the Guerrilla, now two others, the Sanabria brothers, in jail for further murders, were released by the Government authorities "for lack of proof" (read: 'for a sizeable bribe'). This put us back in a dark pit for days, but as repeatedly happens, amongst the blackness, there is so much humanness and light and love to keep us going.

Ned spent a fortnight in Tolima talking to dozens of people, phoning us sometimes several times a day to report and receive advice. On the second Sunday of his stay there, a big article about our case with a large picture of Tristan, Anne and myself appeared in "El Tiempo", the main Colombian newspaper (rightwing by Colombian standards, but fairly open and reasonable by English standards) which he was able to put to excellent use as described in his report below:

"Many people were guarded and slow to talk openly about the murder of our boys, especially those from or near to the hamlet of Hoya Grande where the atrocity took place. But every person did show their repudiation of it and many asked that we come back to live on our farm again and said that they missed us. A lot of people genuinely only knew what they had seen Anne tell of the murders on the TV news. Some said how good they thought it was that Anne dared to do this and that they hoped we carried on in our struggle. But I could not find one witness who would openly testify to facilitate the issuing of arrest warrants, although it is common knowledge that many saw the boys captured and even witnessed the horrific murders. This is commonly known as the Law of Silence: so many people have been killed, or had their families killed, for speaking up. However, some people, when I discreetly cornered them, after very strongly telling me they knew nothing, would then immediately tell me in hushed voices out of the corners of their mouths and whilst glancing over their shoulders, that they wished us the best of luck in our investigations, that lots of people did see, and that for the good of the region they hoped that all members of the gang would soon be captured by the police - or better, and more likely, - by the guerrilla force. Nobody argues about the identity of the murderers when I name names. The same people have killed many other people and are conducting a reign of terror threatening that if anyone tells on them, everyone in the village will pay. That would be quite a few hundred people and nobody is taking any chances.

"In the town of Icononzo, there is a police presence and the country people come there at weekends for the markets. I did not go to Hoya Grande, not so much because of the danger to my own life, which people warned me of (though I believe the murderers feel on the run from us at this stage), but because I knew that people would be even more unlikely to talk to me there where my very presence would cause alarm and anyone seen talking to me could be accused of giving me information by the murderers. Members of the gang do not dare to go to the town of Icononzo now and have someone permanently watching the road to their stronghold in Hoya Grande, ready to raise the alarm if they see the army or police coming in. Apparently a bizarre rumour is also going around that the "gringos" (us) are about to appear with the army – “ with the permission of Marulanda (the guerrilla army chief)!!" We are very grateful to whoever started this colourful legend.

Ned Goes to Pueblo Nuevo for a Confrontation

"On my last day in Icononzo, I got someone to take me on a motorbike up to Pueblo Nuevo, where we lived for 12 years. It is an hour's drive on an extremely bumpy, stony, potholed road. I felt heartened as some people cheered and called my name when they saw me arriving. I was vibrating all over when I got off, partly from the rough ride, but also because I was about to confront Anita, well known to have been involved in the violence that has been done to us, and also in the murder of Don Pedro earlier this year, a very near neighbour of hers and a very dear friend of ours. A few days before he died, he said to a friend of ours in Icononzo: if anything happens to me there is only one person to blame: Anita. She is the confidante of the worst elements locally in the guerrilla force. She was also the only local person who never once visited us on our farm in all the years we were there.

Standing in the middle of the road with another neighbour present and many others watching from a distance, she coolly denied what I told her people were accusing her of. "I wouldn't have the power" (to get our boys killed) was her curious first reaction (rather than "I wouldn't want to"). Also, without me mentioning the subject first, she said she was not behind us being thrown out of our farm, which everyone knows she was.

Ned hands out 'El Tiempo' report of Tris's murder to local people

I made it clear to her that we won't rest until every detail surrounding the case is uncovered (not the normal Colombian attitude!) and that we have all the support of the local people and of the highest leaders of the guerrilla force. As I left her, I handed her a copy of the article in "El Tiempo". People started crowding around her to read it as I left on the motorbike and I gave another copy to another group of people who immediately started looking at it. In Icononzo, I also put copies of the article into two large envelopes addressed to the main leaders of the murderers and got the driver of the country bus about to leave for Hoya Grande to promise to deliver them.

Anne then told me on the phone that the Fiscal (Attorney General) of the Nation wanted me to make a statement about all I had heard, so I had to return to Bogota before leaving for Purace. There I found myself in very different surroundings: plush carpets, computers, secretaries (who can't spell), a huge modern building, metal detectors and armed guards. But the lackadaisical, do-nothing attitude is the same as I found amongst the peasants, except that these people in their suits and offices are worse because they are in no direct danger from the murderers.

Two of the Murderers Walking Free

"When I was in Icononzo, people reported to me their alarm at seeing two of the murderers, the Sanabria brothers, free in Hoya Grande. Somebody told me that their family had held a raffle and raised enough money to pay a lawyer to get them out of prison. The 'Fiscal' is unable to explain how this happened."

What Ned doesn't mention is that he spent most of his time in the office making a complaint about official ineptness and bad attitude and had a big argument about this but finally agreed to delete the complaint in exchange for action (though we all know that with 99% impunity ruling in the country, these are merely words).

The rest of Ned's report was full of small details, fascinating to us because we know all the country people concerned, of conversations, support, constant urges to COME BACK to the area, full agreement with our plans for action in the area, insistence on buying him food and drink, small sums of money handed over for parts of our land they were using (absolutely extraordinary in this country!), hushed Hurrahs! for our speaking out on TV and in the Press and the assertion: "*You people never did anything but good here.*"

One woman in Hoya Grande had some very chilling news: she accidentally stumbled across some shallow graves on her land near the murderers' house, not just two, but "about eight". We wept afresh, not just for our lads, but for all those faceless people who met with the same fate, and for this strangled country.

Lodging in the House of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan...

Meanwhile in Bogota, life took over and has been hectically - perhaps blessedly - busy. We packed up, yet again, and left our quiet refuge in Pacho (3 hours north of Bogota where we still have a fine garden and a dance-teacher friend who now brings us our own produce regularly). Through Anne's extraordinary network of urban contacts, we found ourselves in the almost unreal situation of being housed, as homeless refugees, in the very heart and centre of Colombian history: in the magnificent old-fashioned house of **Jorge Eliecer Gaitan**, the most famous of all assassinated Colombian popular leaders, whose murder (at the instigation of the CIA) in 1948 led to the popular rising which gave birth to the FARC guerrilla force. His daughter Gloria, now in her 60's, is a client and friend of Anne's and is doing her best to continue spreading the words her father died to deliver. He was on the point of becoming president of a truly popular government and met the same fate as Allende in Chile. No wonder the United States is tearing its hair out in rage at its failure to send Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez of Venezuela the same way ..

Darkness creeps in all around
Ghostly shadows, not a sound,
Restless spirits that fill the night
To roam the earth their eternal plight
Then comes the dawn, with a brand new day
Night moves on, 'tis Nature's way.

(a little rhyme sent by an old school friend of Tristan's mother, Becky, in Burtonport, Co. Donegal, with the message "my heart goes out to you all, and my love, Caroline Sweeney." Mary Kelly also sent us many other moving condolences from the fisher-folk of Burtonport who were our neighbours for over 15 years and who knew Tristan as a baby)

On the Move Again

The Colombian Government, in an effort to 'absorb' the popular pull of Gaitan's memory, cleverly made his house a National monument, which meant that his daughter was unable to allow strange homeless foreigners to stay for very long. So Anne and I said to one another: "We want to live Up

There" - pointing to the once-green mountains above Bogota, now covered in the rabbit-warrens of popular settlements such as surround every large Third World city.

Anne knew someone who knew someone who... and we ended up living in the "Sala Comunal" - community centre - of one of these once-illegal suburbs, fighting off dust and pollution-induced illness, preparing to do free theatre to 'pay' for our new lodgings, and agonizing at the noise of the motorway the government have seen fit to slash through the foothills, inches from our door, where once the local people tethered goats.

And now we have moved again, a few yards up the steep incline to live in a communal bakery, at present out of use. On 23rd and 24th December and for a whole week previously we performed theatre, dance, Katie's songs and other activities, often dragging ourselves out of bed, the girls with swollen throats - the pollution here is hideous.

This phase of our lives will continue for a month or so while we continue moves connected with our boys' deaths, earn sufficient money to repair and remove our long-suffering bus which is still stuck in a former refuge, Tabio, and move down to live for a while in the hot-spot of Icononzo, before, hopefully, finally saying a last sad goodbye to Tristan, Javier, our Tolima friends, and moving towards a greener future in the South of Colombia.

"Somehow when the cosmos goes dark, a flame has to be lit in the deepest part of the heart, not in spite of, but precisely because of the otherwise meaninglessness. And the compassionate fight against the horrors of the world continues as long as this flame burns, inextinguishable as it spreads from person to person ... In mysterious ways, Tristan and Javier will live on in ways none of us can calculate. I still have hope for humanity and the planet, in spite of the brutalities to people and to Nature."

- This comes from David Boadella, my therapist from the late 60's and early 70's who in those days gave me the strength to carry on and to whom I owe, at least in part, the strength we have had to find in our present situation. David, now about 67 years old, lives in Switzerland; he himself 20 years ago lost his beloved 18 year old daughter in a terrible fire in London - and his sister lost her 18 year old son in a car-crash caused by someone else's drunken driving. Strange destiny unites us all.

Light Relief from The Irish Ambassador

And now, some anecdotes from Anne. I hope the Irish Ambassador will forgive me for any indiscretion, but I find his comments too much of a jewel not to report..

"The Irish Ambassador in Mexico rang us, anxious to know that we're alright and not about to do anything foolish that would get us killed. He's an extremely intelligent, highly educated, truly diplomatic man, full of Irish wit which had me in stitches for half an hour; I am genuinely grateful for his very human concern (we won't sicken you with the stark contrast of the British Ambassador's hateful attitude). After I had answered all his perspicacious questions, he said, "Now you know what I have to advise you NOT to do, don't you? And I know you won't listen to me as I'm a very conservative person and you're not." Anne: "I think you're secretly not that conservative". Him: "What?! I constantly worry about my pension and you don't even know what a pension fund is. We'd have to capture you and reprogramme you to make you worry about pensions"

"When I complained to him about the British Press and their ugly way of taking advantage of our pain, he told me to put it all in our archives, that they're equal to the American gutter press and on the level of headlines like "I married a Martian" and no-one believes them. And when I said the motto of our campaign is transparency and that we tell everyone everything, he scolded me saying, "That's all very well, but it's not a good idea to sit in a glass house when people are shooting at you."

He made me appreciate the best of the country I've left forever." Anne

Hugs from Unexpected Quarters..

Further anecdotes from Anne to give a taste of this tragic, magic country:

I met a left-winger on the street today that I barely know. He grabbed my hand and pumped it up and down and hugged me. "I saw the article in El Tiempo about you", he said. "Well said! Well said!" I frowned puzzled, not knowing exactly what he was referring to, as we'd been very harsh in our criticisms of Commander Gonzalo of the FARC who caused our boys' deaths by encouraging a delinquent militia in his area and throwing us out in the first place. But it seems that due to media censorship and the mortal danger of declaring your left-wing politics here, Colombians have become expert at extracting subtle implications and messages between the lines so that they often manage to espy meanings one didn't know one had implied in the first place! "The way you didn't criticize all the FARC, just the brutal ones," he explained - "Very good! Very good! Good luck in your fight!" I walked on, a little dazed.

Then I went to the Post Office I always use. I'd been given a false coin in my change there (very common in Colombia) so I was a bit annoyed. I humorously accused the boss who gave me some real coins and then grabbed me and hugged me in front of quite an audience of customers and workers. "I saw the newspaper!" he boomed. "*El pueblo te apoya!*" (The people support you). This time I was really taken aback. We haven't DONE anything! Except name the people in the FARC whose violence and abuse of power has deprived two of our boys of their lives and God knows how many more people they've killed. Not exactly grand heroics. All I'd been after was my 1,000 pesos (about 50p) and suddenly I was being treated like a heroine of the people. "What exactly do you mean?", I asked. "You named the murderers and said you'd talked to the FARC. People are afraid to complain about their atrocities. *El pueblo te apoya en tu lucha.*" (the people support you in your fight). I walked away, bemused.

And just to keep us in touch with our other, greener, life, little Julie, eleven years old and the youngest member of our group, has written a poem in Spanish sent from Purace. Translated, it reads:

Whilst other children study, I work in my garden;
Whilst they travel in cars, I ride on horseback;
Whilst they live in apartment blocks, I am as free as the wind;
When they work in offices, I'll be dancing amongst the trees;
When they are cutting down trees, I'll be trying to protect them;
But I can't do it alone;
Friend, why don't you help me?

Juan Mayr, Nature Destroyer

One person who won't be helping her is Juan Mayr, Colombian Minister for (Destruction of) the Environment. On 5th November, at one of the massive Public Audiences held by FARC and Government, in the demilitarised zone in Caqueta where peace talks are taking place, 1200 people turned up for the session on the environment. Juan Mayr defended fumigation as a solution to the (American) drug problem and Plan (Anti-) Colombia as a solution to the war (i.e. by letting the Americans in to wipe out the guerrilla army)

But William Shakespeare is on our side:

*And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones,
And good in everything.*

(From 'As You Like It, found in a very old issue of Organic Gardening magazine)

I will end with further information reaching us on the identity of one of the two men murdered in the town of Fusagasuga by the Sanabria brothers: he was from Hoya Grande, a former employer of Javier and had been enquiring about his murder.

And a haunting message from Tristan, written to us when on a lean holiday on April 22nd: "***Today is my birthday; there won't be any cake, but I'm glad to be 18.***"

Our love to you Tris, and to Javier, and to the thousands of innocent people you have joined.

Jenny.

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Javier's father asks us to buy him a gun...

Anne finds out later they were *watched by one of the boys' killers*

Information coming in fast on atrocities committed by the same band

GREEN LETTER No. 49 from COLOMBIA,

20th January 2001

The 6th, 7th and 8th of January is holiday time in Colombia, when country people all converge on their nearest market town. It was also exactly 6 months since Tristan and Javier met their terrible end. So we decided it was time for more Action in Icononzo. Anne, Louise, who after returning from Europe was now straining at the leash to do something radical about her nephew's death, and Laura Kelly, all travelled the five hour bus ride to Icononzo, with guitars, determined and in good spirits. For two full days they talked to everyone who would talk to them, which - considering the fear and threats ruling the area - was a very high percentage of the campesinos we had known. Right at the beginning, a local woman approached them fearfully on the street, made a clandestine appointment for her husband to talk to them urgently, and warned them passionately not to go to Hoya Grande, the scene of the crimes, as the murderers, still free there, were 'panting for our blood' after a very outspoken article in Colombia's main newspaper, El Tiempo, in December. Anne of course immediately agreed not to go and anyway there was no shortage of things to do in Icononzo regarding the deaths, as the market town was crowded because of the fiesta.

At Last, an Informant Offers Himself to Us

Later, the woman's husband came to the house where Anne and the girls were staying, petrified but determined to talk. He stayed for two intense, fascinating and disturbing hours; Anne reports it was difficult to hear him as he was so nervous he whispered. Essentially he said he was sick of the killing and of the apathy of the Guerrilla leaders, that he used to be a friend of a former, very good, Commander and hated what Gonzalo had done to the region. He said he was willing to die, but wanted it to be for something worthwhile. He had a contact who was a colonel in the regular army who was out to get Gonzalo and that things had got so bad, he himself wanted the Army to come into the region. He gave the colonel's telephone number and urged Anne to contact him. This is what Anne has to say in the matter: 'I told him immediately that to exchange some thugs with guns for worse thugs with guns is not a solution and that I don't want to get involved. But Jenny who is into a 'social survey' of all aspects of Colombia says she would at least be interested in talking to this Army man and Louise is keen too. Jenny dreams of getting the Guerrilla and the Army together to clean up the area: that would be historic and the beginning of a true revolution! I respected my informant totally and told other people - of course without mentioning his name - of his suggestion to several other people in Icononzo. Everyone was against it as the Army kill indiscriminately and call the corpses 'guerrilleros'. But the man has provided us with a fantastic pressure point with the guerrilla themselves and I have already used it in an e-mail letter to them.

Louise's Report on the Icononzo Mission

"All the long hot journey to Icononzo I thought of Tristan, how he had travelled all that way, just to be killed.

"Icononzo was preparing for a big festival, with bull fighting, horse parades and shows. I knew I would meet a lot of old friends and very possibly our worst enemies, the murderers. The small town was packed with people and I was surprised at how many came up to us to talk. Most people were incredibly friendly, though nervous to be seen talking to us. In general, people avoided talking specifically about the deaths

of our boys, they preferred to talk about how we lost our land, or anything superficial. When we insisted on talking about the murders, they would quickly end the conversation and go their way.

“Sometimes I thought it wasn't just fear, but simply a lack of hope that they could change anything in their region: a feeling of pointlessness and powerlessness. But we also had some extraordinary encounters with intelligent, amazing people who are struggling desperately to do something about the horrifying situation they are living in. Being in Icononzo brought home to me once again the nightmarish reality of how our boys died. Simple details get to me the most, like sitting in the chair where Tristan had sat the night before his death in a friend's house, where he was warned not to go. Or listening to a lady from near Hoya Grande tell us how Tris went to her house to order a sack of cane sugar and how she didn't know for ages why he didn't call back for it.

“I saw a man being knocked down and trampled on by the bull in the ring which I had been avoiding looking at as I passed by. The audience cheered. A culture where torturing animals and getting nearly killed by them is 'fun' is a culture with something deeply wrong with it. No wonder our boys were abandoned by the people in the football pitch when the murderers were chasing them. I felt myself getting very frustrated and angry with everyone. I can't bear to think the murderers are being allowed to continue normal lives. It simply doesn't make sense that hundreds of families go under to a small band of murderers. I would say this to people as nicely as possible, and they would agree. And then continue to do nothing.’

Coralling an Instigator of the Killings

Anne now takes up the story:

'We saw Anita, the woman behind Don Pedro's murder on the street. We surrounded her and I gave her the full frontal. I said she was responsible for Don Pedro's death. She tried to imply he was killed for *good reasons*, which is evil rubbish and I told her so. I told her that we have excellent contact with the FARC at national level and that they are investigating. All the local people I later told about the encounter loved it and said no-one had ever dared confront her before and that she IS the root of all the trouble here and it was good to 'spoil her day', but to be careful, she was treacherous as a snake. Someone said one of her delinquent sons has 30 armed men at his command.

The new mayor of Icononzo we knew already - his daughter was brutally murdered on the street by paramilitaries some months back. He gave us a long diatribe about how everything is impossible and we'd better give up, during which Lou and I told him in our different ways that this was a stupid attitude. In the end, he got quite upset and told how he had to risk his life all the time as Mayor (true everywhere in Colombia) and had to maintain contact with both sides (paramilitaries and guerrilla) to try and save people in danger and that he would go in with us to Hoya Grande to look for the bodies. This, however, is far too dangerous at the moment.

A Murderer's Wife Confronted

We talked to an ex-neighbour of ours who we know was one of the men who ran away when Tris and Javier pleaded for help, and who may even have witnessed the killings. He denies all this, but perhaps to make up for his guilt is now very helpful and supportive and immediately pointed out the young fat, sick-looking little wife of Nelson Parra, the leader of the murderers. I followed her to get a bit of distance from our neighbour so as not to implicate him, then tapped her on the shoulder and introduced myself as family

of the boys her husband murdered on 9th July. She denied this angrily. I replied that if she didn't know by now that her husband is a murderer then she must be the only person in Hoya Grande and Icononzo who doesn't and must be blind and stupid.

Just then, Javier's father walked up to us and I introduced him: 'And this is the father of the Colombian boy your husband murdered'. Then, pointing to the little dark boy beside her who was listening fascinated, I asked her if her husband was a good person to have kids with? She claimed she didn't know much about her husband's life as she mostly lives with her father. I told her we were going to visit the Guerrilla HQ with the families of all the people her husband had killed. She began to walk away, shouting at me and shaking with fury (and probably fear).

Javier's Father

Javier's father and I left her, and he began to beg me to help him get a gun (he is extremely poor) so that he can kill the murderers (whom he doesn't even know by sight). He is a simple, straightforward campesino and that is his solution. He and the rest of his family are in terrible danger yet he is one of the bravest people we met. He accompanied me everywhere publicly. Then we got photocopies of the *El Tiempo* article and stood where the country buses go back to Hoya Grande where Tris and Javier were killed and Pueblo Nuevo where we had lived (an hour's drive away). We gave out the articles as leaflets and so many people came up to us for them that I had to keep sending the girls off with extra pesos to get more copies. As a result of this success, Louise hit upon the idea of writing our own leaflet to distribute and this we did. It gave a list of the names, where known, of the 14 people we so far know of who were killed by the same gang and stated we were going to gather a group of the surviving relatives together to go to the South of Colombia to see the guerrilla command and make a complaint about the state of the region. We invited people to contact us by telephone in Bogota (a 'safe' number given to us by someone who will 'field' calls) if they would like to join us, or give more information. This leaflet we handed to everyone on the bus waiting to go to Hoya Grande. It was received with amazing enthusiasm, and when I stood at the front of the bus to make a little speech, I was warmly agreed with when I said that we cannot leave things like this and that we will continue to fight till the end and that we are not blaming the people of Hoya Grande, only those directly responsible. Of about 25 people there, only two men scowled.

After this, we were going to sing at the festival, but I suddenly got an enormous dose of nerves, not to be ignored, so we immediately took the bus out of Icononzo to a safe town.

A Murderer Watches

I have one remaining regret from our visit: that I wasn't given the following information while we were there, but only by 'phone when back in Bogota: and that is that one of the murderers, **Joselo Sanabria Guerrero**, had been standing with a group of men about two yards from us outside a cafe on Icononzo square and had evidently started shaking with alarm as I scanned the faces of the men to see if I knew anyone. Had Laura, Louise and I known, we would have lynched him!

Another Horror Story about the same gang of Murderers, by Anne

I have just been to see one of the refugee men who with their families are squatting the Red Cross Headquarters in Bogota. I had heard when we did theatre there a few days ago for the refugee kids, that there was a family there who had been relocated by the Government on a farm for refugees two years

ago between Icononzo and Hoya Grande and who had to leave because they had been attacked by the 25th front of the FARC - i.e. Gonzalo's lot, who had murdered three people, one woman cut to pieces by machete. We recognised the style immediately. My informant was the sole survivor of a paramilitary massacre in the north of Colombia where 7 people died. He played dead and thus escaped, with four bullets in his body. He showed me the scars, desperate to be believed: I've met this before in other refugees - their plight is so ignored by the Government, the media and urban Colombians in general that they don't expect to be believed! This man had done what few do, he had denounced the paramilitary killers, with names. He was threatened and so gladly accepted a government resettlement offer in 'Paradise Farm' (El Paraiso), Icononzo, Tolima. He and 13 other families were put on a bus to Tolima with a lorry load of food behind them and dumped in Icononzo. Three of them were soon murdered. He appeared reluctant to name names at first. 'The Chaparrales?' I asked, using the local nickname for the band who killed our lads and so many more people. He nodded. When I asked had he seen the woman macheted to death, he burst into tears. He said the militia-men were insisting that the refugees send their kids to the militia and that they took two of his, but they ran away. One was now working in Bogota and was threatened by the paramilitaries just the day before our conversation. He came to the Red Cross to be with his father, but the police refused to let him in (they have orders not to let any more refugees join as this would swell the ranks of the public demonstration - in a very posh area - which the Government has had on its hands for a year now). The boy jumped the railings and the police threatened to take him out by force. The father retaliated by threatening an international scandal if they did. He won. No wonder I got dirty looks from the cops today when I spoke to him.

Continuing his story, he said: 'All 13 families left 'Paradise Farm'. I am very confused,' said the man. 'I know the paras are bad because they kill just to kill. But I didn't think the FARC are like that.' He said he believed their High Command are good willed but that there is no communication between the bases and the top. Exactly what we have found to be the case. I said the only way this can be resolved is if we all complain loudly. He was scared and said that Colombia is a labyrinth, but he agreed to accompany us to the demilitarised zone in Caqueta if we get a group of victims' relatives together to confront the FARC command.

Chance encounters continue to occur, providing a guiding line through the labyrinth: I have a very long-standing devotedly left-wing friend from the near defunct 'Patriotic Union' party - defunct because the government have murdered at least 3,000 of their members. This woman told me recently that whilst working in Putumayo, (the department adjacent to Caqueta in S. Colombia) in the early nineties, giving classes in politics to community leaders, there was a FARC Commander called Gonzalo in her class. She didn't know I knew him, and I kept a straight face and held my breath. She said he and another commander had been sent as replacements for two excellent commanders who had been killed by the Army and that soon they had ruined the social support base of the revolutionary army in the whole area with their brutality. I asked her if Comandante Gonzalo was tall, young and good looking? (very few FARC guerrilleros are tall, because of their racial background). 'Yes,' she said, surprised. I then told her of our tragic connection with Gonzalo and she told me that a female local leader had once confronted him, along with a group of local people, as he had kidnapped the local mayor and tied him to a tree. They achieved his release. Now I happened to know the local leader she mentioned, as she is also a refugee at the Red Cross building and I had helped her in a critical moment when the police were about to attack the place. She had had to leave Putumayo because of confronting Gonzalo."

Anne has an arrangement to meet with this woman in the next few days.

A little light relief

And now for a little slightly light relief, also from Anne's endless fountain of anecdotes:

Anne's astrological profession takes her into every social corner of complex Colombian life, including the higher echelons of the Police Security Department (DAS). Some ladies of this Dept. asked Anne in hushed voices what is it like in the guerrilla zone and are the guerrilla leaders *good looking*? A little later in the conversation, one of the ladies whom Anne had viewed as somewhat conservative, exploded into a passionate tirade against the corruption of the official army who, according to her, only had interest in staying safe and getting rich while sending the sons of the poor to the front. Another DAS lady sighed and said the work she would really like to be doing is 'to have an NGO like you and work with campesinos in the countryside.'

"I'd like to be working in the countryside too", sighed JJ as she ended yet another Town 'green' letter. But there is still much to be done, with more 'Gonzalo' information pouring in practically daily. The next instalment will come shortly. I thank you all for listening to our story.

With love - and in need of SEEDS for our still-mainly-rural community.

Jenny

P.S. From Becky in Ireland

A big thank you to everyone who has written letters to the Government and to the Colombian Ambassador Victor Ricardo. As a result of all this pressure, Anne reports that they have been offered a bodyguard for their protection! All the letter writing works, and we are very grateful that people have taken time and effort to follow up on our requests for help. Also please any of you that still have patience and time, there could never be too many letters written so please keep writing them. Copies to us are always welcome.

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Top FARC commander invites us back to El Pato

We are offered body-guards. And refuse them.

And much more...

GREEN LETTER No 50 from Colombia, 8th March 2001

There is no good reason why good cannot triumph as often as evil. The triumph of anything is a matter of organisation.

Kurt Vonnegut

This is a goodbye letter - goodbye to Bogota. In a few hours I will be on a bus with my daughter Katie heading back to the mountains and greenery of Purace. The reasons for my 'release' from 7 months of soul-death and city pollution are both tragic and hopeful.

Massacre in Purace

A few short weeks ago, catastrophe fell upon the National Park of Purace - this time not our own children, but the loved ones of 9 other families, when a group of hillwalkers were insanely murdered, shot, by the 13th Front of the FARC, that is, the one operating in the area of our farm there. And for goodness knows what ironies of Destiny, a group of our children, six of them, were witness to them being captured and taken away.

There is no way of entering into details in a Letter of this length, nor would it be politically advisable in the ever-more complicated situation of a worsening civil war. Suffice it to say that we are working with the victims' families, sharing grief and militance and determination with them and many hundreds of Nature-lovers and ecologists in Colombia whose protests centre around the theme '**the hills are ours**'. A long march of hundreds is planned for Easter Week to retrace the steps of their dead comrades and 'reclaim the Park' from the war. Hopefully we will be able to help in a very practical manner from our farm, which tragically is only a few minutes away from where the victims were taken.

This tragedy necessitated yet another journey of Anne's to the Demilitarized Zone where the Government and FARC leaders are holding 'peace talks', as the Park Director who originally begged us to go and live in Purace to work with the Indians there was hugely alarmed and telling us to leave immediately. However upon further assurances that the Commander responsible for these new absolutely baseless killings was to be immediately called to judgement and that our position there was guaranteed, we decided not to become refugees again just yet.

To Hoya Grande by Helicopter?

Meanwhile there was a second rather large reason for Anne to talk to the guerrilla leaders. As a result of all your letters of protest and pressure to the Colombian Government via various ambassadors, at long last the attorney general's office decided it was politic to take action in the case of our murdered boys. During one particular week, we practically lived in the heavily-guarded government office giving testimony. The Plan - which absolutely horrified us at first - was to drop into Hoya Grande by helicopter with a massive Army backup to look for the boys' remains - and those of many other victims of the same band.

Two of us could accompany this official mission. We chose me and my daughter Louise (19) although anyone more scared of air-transport than myself would be hard to find - and the idea of our helicopter being punctured by guerrilla gunfire as we entered with 'the wrong side' wasn't my idea of a pic-nic. So we did the outrageous. We informed the guerrilla of our intentions (with official agreement for doing so - but

that's an 'official secret' in this ever more astonishingly paradoxical country) and asked them please not to shoot at us. To cut a long tale short, they agreed.

We were told to be ready at 3.0 a.m. on 26th February and off we drove to Tolima. My nerves disappeared as we entered the official car: we heard we were not going by helicopter after all but by road, accompanied by lorry-loads of soldiers. And so it was, the most ridiculous theatre: ramshackle lorries, boy soldiers with their legs dangling as they sat in the open backs, us sandwiched in a car in the middle. Anything more inviting of a guerrilla ambush, a grenade, a mine, I can't imagine. Louise and I marvelled the whole way at the massively stupid tactics of the Army and I understood why a handful of peasant guerrillas had been able over the years to get the upper hand, and why so many soldiers are slaughtered.

We trundled in to an 'Army base' - a few flimsy tents in an exposed grove near Icononzo - and met the young colonel in charge of the operation. He proudly assured us we were being guarded by 180 soldiers. I was a little concerned about what all my former neighbours and comrades might think of us invading with the Army. I studiously spoke to no-one and looked at no-one in Hoya Grande, the tiny hamlet where our tragedy took place, so as not to implicate anyone in this somewhat lunatic mission. But one or two former neighbours deliberately searched to make eye contact and beamed total support .. I was amazed.

Hours Spent Talking to an Army Commander

The enormous group of people - technical experts sent by the government and a bevy of soldiers - spent the whole day digging test holes over a wide area we'd had indicated to us via a chain of frightened witnesses. Nothing was found, as I had indeed hoped as I couldn't contemplate the idea. The Army Major in charge of the team and myself sat on a log and talked. I was undergoing some quiet inner de-programming. I have spent a life-time shunning police and army as inhuman enemies. But here I was, talking to a very human human being. 'I've got three kids and I only see them once a month and I want this war over,' the army commander told me, and 'Alfonso Cano (one of the top guerrilla leaders) is an intellectual. He likes to drink, he likes the good life. He wants peace, he doesn't want to be stuck there in the jungle. But the hardliners . . .' 'You know a lot about the guerrilla' I said, astonished. 'I have to, it's my job,' he grinned.

Retracing Tris and Javier's last steps

Then by radio-phone they put us in touch with Julio and Baudelina, the peasant couple who were the adoptive parents of my other grandson, 14-year-old Brendan, for whom Tristan had lost his life - it was to say goodbye to Brendan before going to Ireland that Tris went with Javier on his last fatal journey.

Brendan's stepmother Baudelina begged us to go to her house. 'But won't that put you in danger, being seen with us?' we asked, horrified - she lives next door to one of the murderers and we have feared horribly for the safety of all three of them and begged her to leave often; but her peasant attachment to her land made her refuse. So we spent hours with her, with about 30 army men guarding her house. My grandson Brendan begged to come away with us, and very carefully and tactfully, Louise and I worked on Baudelina to extract her permission for him to go. She was terrified of us taking him away for good, and this time, her suspicions were well-founded, as we were determined to get them all out of there if at all possible. It was horrible having to deceive her, but her stubborn peasant mentality made her stick like glue to her known ways, oblivious to the danger they were in.

This time, she let Brendan go 'for a week' and we took our precious treasure carefully wrapped in Louise's protective arms, all of us somewhat stunned by events, home with us under military escort to Bogota. He is now safely on our farm, and we are trying to get his adoptive parents to join us, a very difficult decision for them.

In order not to turn this Letter into a Book, I must now move forward in time to the following weekend, when Anne and Louise returned - without the Army - to Icononzo on a follow-up mission.

Icononzo Again

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Anne reports: 'For me this visit to Icononzo was the most satisfying and pleasant and the time people have been friendliest and least scared to talk to us openly. No-one disapproved of Jenny and Lou going in with the Army and at one point a lady approached me and said, *'Thank you very much for everything you are doing for the region; we know that you only do things that are good for the people and you are helping us all.'* At this point, our brains die as we fail to understand Colombia ... normally, our actions would have been seen as high treason punishable by immediate execution.

And Another Visit to FARC HQ

And now a report of Anne's visit to the Guerrilla Headquarters in Caqueta the same weekend I went to Tolima with the Army .. She spoke to **Alfonso Cano** who calls her the *'Warrior Irishwoman'* and he expressed great concern that a tragedy be avoided in Hoya Grande (that is, if the guerrilla attacked what we at the time thought would be a helicopter landing). **Joaquin Gomez**, another of the top guerrilla leaders, gave Anne over an hour of his time (in the middle of peace talks with the Government!). He expressed outrage that the people of Hoya Grande had not **clanned together to kill the militia responsible for so many deaths** - a sentiment we have often shared but which in his case is actually totally unreasonable seeing that it is because of FARC backing that these local psychopaths dare to wreak havoc with people's lives. Anne repeated the many details of our case and of the situation in the Icononzo area and told of her long walks through the mountain areas to try and get justice via a regional commander. Joaquin humorously requested her to be his guide next time he needs to go to Tolima as she knows the area so well .. and he repeated that he wanted us to go and live in the Demilitarized Zone to help with drug-crop substitution, a request he makes every time Anne sees him. He said we can go back to El Pato, where this campaign started, any time we like.

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News of Pending Revenge in Hoya Grande

Meanwhile I have to report that a group of local people in Hoya Grande have had enough of years of killings and are taking matters into their own hands. Our informant also tells us that the day we went to Hoya Grande, the band of militiamen, 10 of them, had the road mined and grenades ready if we were to advance any further 'inland'. It took no more than two civilian women - Louise and myself - to spot the obviousness of this danger. Not however evidently the Colombian Army.

We also heard further intensely painful details of our boys' deaths: that it was initially only Tristan the gang went for. Javier was free and could have escaped. But how could he? How could anyone leave a friend? So he protested and was killed as well.

And at least one man, a 'friend' and neighbour, tall, young and strong, who knew Tris since he was little and whom Tris would have run to for help, was ordered to help capture and tie the boys. He, and others, obeyed.

Louise and I had walked the last pathway our boys walked, to the abandoned house, to the area where they must still be lying. I couldn't feel. Anything. Sometimes life becomes so unreal, you just can't.

* * * * *

NEWS IN BRIEF

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The Vice-Presidency of Colombia wrote to us at the end of January offering us body-guards. I declined, but used the opportunity to demand protection for the people who really need it - the peasants of Hoya Grande. This letter eventually brought about our armed entry into Hoya Grande. Not quite what I had in mind.

When Anne was in Icononzo, she met Javier's mother who tried to insist that Javier was still alive. Anne gently but firmly denied this and the woman burst into tears. Anne repeated our offer that she and her husband and children leave the danger of Icononzo and come and live with us in the South. She immediately enumerated her few possessions - a couple of rustic beds for instance - and asked would they fit on our old bus. It looks like we're going to be forming a refugee settlement.

When the families of the Purace Park victims went to talk to the guerrilla leaders to demand justice, and mentioned us, the FARC leaders acted out 'ducking' in mock fear and trembling at mention of our names ..

Many of us dream about Tristan. I did only once: he came in, white and soft and allowing us all to hold him and give him the love he needed (in life he was a little stiff and difficult). As I held him, he got younger and younger until he was a baby sitting on my knee ..

On February 1st. a radio station in Galway (West of Ireland) phoned me in Bogota and got me to do a radio interview about our situation.

In Colombia, the Press whom I have so often berated, treated the information we were able to give about the Purace massacre with extreme delicacy and caution so as not to bring danger to anyone.

Cristina, one of our long-term Colombian members, returned to her family in Caqueta for some months before rejoining us. During that time, she was kidnapped by the FARC and held for a month **chained by the neck to a tree** with another girl whilst their identity was 'investigated.' This story we have heard many times and never wanted to believe till it happened to someone we know so well. She has eloquently written up her story and we are working out how best to use it to force the FARC to clean up their act.

One day our children in Purace were on the local once-a-week bus to the market town of Belen. They took with them washed raw carrots from the garden and were munching them. Everyone on the bus wanted one and soon all the peasants, including old men, were munching away on organic carrots and declaring what wonderful pure food it was!

Anne recently had telephone contact with our old friend Camilo the teacher in Guayabal, El Pato. He said there is now a community rubbish-recycling and compost-making project and community garden there .

Life continues. We remember and mourn our boys, but their spirits now are joined in our minds with so many fresh deaths of peasants and students and community leaders; they are part of the phenomenon called Colombia. Last night in the dark heavy tortured hours, I lay in soul-agony, my mind full of the decades of hateful details I had been told of hideous injustice in the countryside, within the jurisdiction of a movement I once had hoped would be revolutionary. And I came very close to hating Colombia. But this morning I awoke, deciding to go home to Purace. Already I feel alive, revitalized, in love again with our long long chosen mission ahead.

**My heart tells me
That the time of compromise
Has passed.
Now the work I do
Must nourish me
And heal the earth
And free our common spirit .**

(from 'Green Prints' Gardening Magazine, USA)

Goodbye City, and goodbye dear readers, till I write again from the mountain air.

'I believe we would be happier to have a personal revolution in our individual lives and go back to simpler living and more direct thinking. It is the simple things of life that make living worthwhile, the sweet fundamental things such as love and duty, work and rest, and living close to Nature .'

Laura Ingalls Wilder (ibid.)

With love to you all,

Jenny James.

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Guerrilla jeep blown up that had just offered our lads a lift

Psychic events abound...

GREEN LETTER No. 51, 17th May 2001

Purace, Huila, COLOMBIA

In the church cemetery in the village of Viru-Jaagupi (Estonia) is a brass cross... It eulogizes one Manure-Bag Mats. 'Mats was a man who took pride in cleaning his horse's droppings from the street as they occurred,' explained the church rector. 'He put the manure on to his fields, which then prospered. He thought Manure-Bag was an honourable nickname, and asked that it be put on his grave.'

From National Geographic, April 1983

That somewhat odd opener sets the scene for the last two sad and beautiful months back in my mountain home near the National Park of Purace. Sad because the vibrant aliveness of the Green all around, our lifestyle and work, the plants we cultivate, the songs we sing and the theatre we continue to create, all are imbued with Tristan, my murdered farmer/performer grandson, who never lived to see this latest farm of ours, which we all think is the loveliest yet. To feel joy in living again, after the 7 nightmare months of investigations into our boys' deaths, brings with it the pangs of guilt that they cannot share it with us.

LOUISE LECTURES THE FARC COMMAND

Anne continues to work on the legal side in Bogota, with a small team to help her. And on 15th March, Louise (19) travelled alone the long journey to the 'demilitarized zone' which is the guerrilla headquarters granted by the government, down in Caqueta where we started this campaign. She was granted THREE hours of the busy guerrilla leader's time, one of which was spent singing dozens of songs to the young guerrilleros guarding him while a TV news reporter interrupted Louise's interview to film him: he was Alfonso Cano, the chief FARC 'intellectual'. 'Go in there and sing,' he said, 'I'll still be able to hear you and we must keep on talking afterwards.' A somewhat astonished Louise complied - in the past, Anne has been grateful for 5 minutes of this busy man's time.

A Young Guerrillero Knows One of Lou's songs from his childhood in El Pato

Lou recounts that in the middle of her sing-song, a young guerrillero started singing for her one of her own songs written when she was about 15, which he had heard at one of our first theatre performances in 'El Pato'! And when Cano recalled her, the guerrilleros were dismayed, as Louise was busy teaching them some of our songs.

Alfonso first wanted to know all about our community, what our aims are, where we have lived and why we were thrown out: this from the Leader of the Army who made us refugees... Lou said *she* didn't know and we still want to find out! He encouraged her to find the commander of El Pato and ask... Oh crazy country!

The promises emanating from this meeting (which should be taken with a large dose of Colombian salt) are that Alfonso Cano will organize a meeting between us and the murderers of our boys and lots of comandantes in a kind of revolutionary court case. He said several of us should be there with every possible bit of information we can get.

I had sent Louise with a long letter I'd written outlining once again the desperate situation in Hoya Grande and pointing out (again) that the FARC are losing all their basis of support amongst the peasants through the insane tactics of their local militia; we also enclosed photos of Tris and Javier. Lou reports that Alfonso Cano over and again referred to my letter and pored over the photos of our dead boys in disbelief, saying, 'They are so young!' He was extremely interested in our whole life-style and work and said the FARC are faced with so much environmental work that we should all be working together rather than having to solve these horrible problems... he said when we have resolved this terrible situation, he would like us to do theatre in their zone.

Louise reports:

AC felt like a big daddy, very sensitive, almost... pacifist! He simply couldn't believe that anyone in the FARC would just kill for no reason. I said, 'But what about the hillwalkers murdered in Purace and so many other murders all over Colombia?' He just kept saying, 'Terrible, terrible!' He was having a mini nervous breakdown, he was really uncomfortable and had an extreme nervous reaction every time I told him something horrible, whacking the chair or table. In the whole meeting, it was mainly me who talked, he hardly said anything except to express how horrified he was at everything. At one point I said to him, '**You seem like you don't live in Colombia. Things like our case are happening all the time.**'

FARC leader preaches pacifism!

I had told him I would be willing to kill the murderers of my nephew Tristan and he had a fit at this saying **that violence only creates more violence** and that that isn't the solution to the problem! And he asked us to please be very controlled when the face-to-face meeting happens and behave like in a court case and not scream at the murderers or have all our feelings out there and then, or **to play tricks on the FARC and kill the murderers during the meeting!** He told me that two weeks before our meeting, he had met Comandante Gonzalo (the brute commander who brought about our displacement and was directly responsible for our boys' deaths) and asked him what the hell was going on with the FARC militia-men and that Gonzalo answered: 'They are not saints, but do a lot of good work.' I burst out incredulously with, 'So they do *good work* as well as murdering children and women and innocent people?!' Whereupon he sat back in his chair and kind of sighed.

During the whole meeting, I felt great relief that I was finally getting through to him, after 8 months of Anne and Jenny working for this. Jenny's letters were so important to him: he had them in front of him during the whole meeting and kept reading bits of them out loud and getting me to clarify a point. At the end, I asked him innocently did he want me to wait in San Vicente to receive a concrete date and place for the 'court case'. 'No, no, no, no!' he said alarmed, 'Go home and we'll get the message to you some time because I don't know when I can get this organized.' During the meeting, I felt I was talking 'man to man' with him and sometimes I even felt older than him...!

Those are just some of the details of Louise's extraordinary encounter. Since then, intensive work has continued with the Attorney General, the families of other victims, and the more radical residents of the hamlet of Hoya Grande. Most recently, Cristina, a long-term Colombian member of our group, has been down to Icononzo to leaflet the people there, Anne is planning a big demonstration using our bus as a focal point and also she plans to have a memorial stone made with an accusatorial inscription to erect near where the boys were captured.

Katie's Strange Premonition

In the aftermath of the Purace murders, the guilty guerrillas were hauled up by the FARC high command as promised, and now the Army have come in to our area. One day some of the Colombian boys living with us were travelling to Belen, our nearest market town; they refused a lift in a guerrilla jeep, preferring to go on their bikes. That jeep was blown up an hour later by the Army and the young guerrilleros were all killed. A few days previously, our 6 girls had travelled in it to the nearest town. While they were riding along in the back, Katie (15) was suddenly seized with intense fear and said to the others, "Oh god, what if we're blown up, what will poor Jenny and Ned do, we are the future of the community and they won't have anything to live for." She's a strange girl.

Having recently spent so much time in personal grief, and then sharing the mourning of the families of the young folk murdered in Purace, I felt cold when I first heard of the young guerrilleros dying, whereas I used to care tremendously. But fate was not to allow me to remain hard: the same day, working in the glory of the evening garden, a band of young teenage guerrilleros came through the garden from the forest, shared the news and a fruit juice and went their way. One look at their young, worried faces and I knew: this war isn't between people, it's a machine we're all caught up in.

Louise sees a Ghost

One day soon after returning to the countryside, I was alone with Katie and I said to her: 'What do you think about survival of any kind of energy after death? It doesn't exist, does it?' We both agreed there was nothing. At that moment, Louise came white faced up from our centre cabin and said that she had just walked into the kitchen and no one was there .. except a Man standing with his back to her in silence. She blinked hard, knowing he was not one of us, and he still remained, motionless. She screamed for the other girls and he disappeared. 'How old do you think he was?' I asked. 'About 30', she said.

It was the first anniversary of the death of the son - executed by the FARC for robbery and murders - of the previous owner of our farm. Louise did not know this. He was 30.

It was after that execution that the man's mother had allowed us to live on her farm as she could no longer bear to. All her family were implicated in at least four murders and countless robberies. Ned was talking one day to our next-door neighbour (here that means the farm across the stream, a vigorous walk away) and he was speaking well of the criminal family. Ned was confused and said, 'But isn't it true they killed people?' 'Oh yes,' said our neighbour dismissively, 'but only one or two people.' I recount this anecdote in an attempt to communicate the mind-eclipsing morality of this country.

But the day to day reality of our lives is not this: it is strenuous, delicious though tiring, physical work on the gardens, afternoons working on our environmental theatre, preparing to take it, along with our therapeutic psychological work to a group of psychology students in the town of Popayan, Cauca, on the other side of the National Park. I was working with them when Tris died and now feel ready to resume my task, something I thought I could never do.

Paramilitary Chainsaw Massacre

The Department of Cauca has been taken over by paramilitaries. They make the FARC look like kittens. Recently at least 100 indigenous people were massacred by them with chainsaws... even the urban Press bleeped. But we want to continue, we want to live here; it is so beautiful, it is... peaceful, healing peace all around us in our valley. We need it, for the never-ending work ahead, a work well described by a favourite writer of mine, **Loren Eiseley**, in 'The Immense Journey':

The need is not really for more brains, the need is now for a gentler, a more tolerant people than those who won for us against the ice, the tiger and the bear. The hand that hefted the ax, out of some old, blind allegiance to the past, fondles the machine gun as lovingly. It is a habit man will have to break to survive, but the roots go very deep...

Good wishes to you all,

Jenny James

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Tris and Javier's remains handed over

Visit to Regional FARC commander

GREEN LETTER No 52 from Colombia, 8th July 2001

'I truly believe that we in this generation must come to terms with nature, and I think we're challenged as mankind has never been challenged before to prove our maturity and mastery, not of nature, but of ourselves.' Rachel Carson (over 3 decades ago)

Tomorrow is the first anniversary of the murder of Tristan and Javier. Becky, my 38 year old daughter who is Tristan's mother, is here with me at our settlement in Purace. I asked her to write some words, not about Tris, but about her first impressions of this, our 7th farm in Colombia.

'You can't feel the pains and danger of Colombia here. The first thing that really hit me after being in Ireland, then 3 weeks in Bogota, is what I can only describe as a loud Silence. No background noise, just the rivers, trees rustling, birds. The climate is like a warm Irish summer, the surroundings are very, very Green. The life-style on the farm is very organized which gives a feeling of 'time' that my life in Ireland does not have.

'The day begins at 5 a.m. and everyone is asleep by 9.0 p.m. or earlier. From dawn to midday, everyone works very, very hard to run the kitchen, gardens, to do the washing (all by hand and out of doors of course), to build extensions to the existing wooden house to make room for more people and space for dancing and theatre. In the afternoons, time to practice music. At least four people are learning the violin, others the guitar, flute and piano. Katie endlessly composes her beautiful songs, we sew and mend and write . . .

'Howler monkeys sing in the woodlands opposite. The earth in the garden is dark and rich. Short, dark Indians call with their produce or to ask for any spare old blankets. The garden is one of the largest and most productive the Community has had so far; there are non-stop vegetable dinners, an abundance of cabbages, lettuce, celery, beetroot, carrots, radish, swedes, leeks, onions and so much more, including local fruits with interesting tastes. This is not magic, it is created by plenty of steady hard work, the teenage girls, who on stage look like angels from heaven, are out happily collecting cow and horse manure. 12 sacks from just two girls this morning.

Even in a country at war there are still untouched, beautiful places like this farm in this lovely forested valley ..'

***Early to bed, plus afternoon naps,
Will get your crops planted before you collapse.***
(Charlotte Waldron, Organic Gardening Mag.)

A Very Rewarding 3 day therapy group

At the end of May, I was invited to run a 3 day intensive therapeutic experience for a mixed bunch of people in Popayan, a town 7 hours away by milk lorry. I had suggested a new type of group therapy involving brief performances of some of our environmental plays, plus one on the violence in Colombia and this was enthusiastically agreed to. I took all our young girls plus our shiatsu/juggler/compost-carrying friend Andy who has been with us off and on for 8 years.

It was a tremendous experience for everyone involved and is leading to many future invitations including the strange sensation of being asked to run a counselling group for 20 teachers from 'Carton Colombia' schools. Now that enterprise, part of an environment- ravishing multinational headed by one Michael Smurfit of Ireland, is to a Green campaigner what a nuclear submarine is to my peace activist friends in Europe ...

What Irish Smurfit has done to Colombia

I went to talk to the teachers who will be organizing the event. We travelled through a horrible area where as far as the eye could see, natural Colombia had disappeared, to be replaced by a sea of sterile pine trees. The air was still and dead, the ground dried up and depressing; the entire local population dependent on this nightmare monster and its 'do-good' image-enhancing works like the neat little schools .. I felt sick. But I will go and do the group for the teachers in September .. interesting. I have been told that one word of criticism in that vast Empire means instant dismissal, at best, or if you get too insistent, death.

*Resistance is the quiet and unremarked daily rejection
of all that degrades and debases.
It is the silent and solemn persistence
in not surrendering to the system.
Resistance is keeping our inner vision
clear and intact.*

Brian Quail, Trident Ploughshares.

Our girls sing on Radio

After the Popayan group, one of the participants rushed off to the local radio station, a very radical one run from a University, to organize for our singing girls to spend hours recording in their studio; they also recorded long interviews with myself and the girls, the interviewer woman at times in tears listening to us talk about Colombia, our recent losses, and our work here.

Theatre in the Gruelling Heat

Then we received a phone call from the Mayor of Argentina, the little country town that is the 'capital' of the rural area we live in. Would we perform on the '**Day of the Peasant-Farmer**' .. 9 hours drive by milk lorry and by the mayor's special car .. agonizing as we passed the road leading to our valley, we so much wanted to go home, but no, off to the hideous noise the country-people think is fun, to sing sensitive songs and put on the very sensitive wordless dance-play that Tris used to star in called '***The Four Elements***' about what happens when Man tries to bend Nature to his ways.

'Never Again'

The Mayor was drunk, but we did our duty in horrendous conditions, then went 'home' to the cool wooden floor of an old people's home to rest for a moment before an evening performance .. and next morning the requests came flooding in. The young President of the local action committees of the whole area called to ask for a full-scale theatre in July. '**What we most want,**' he said, '**is your environmental message.**' Out the window flew our freshly spoken ever-repeated curse NEVER AGAIN, which comes like a mantra after every rotten experience of Colombian mis-organization, only to melt like the girls' stage makeup in the hot midday sun at the first sign of a truly sensitive request.

And then, last year's Mayor, for whom Alice and I, a long long time ago before we knew we'd never see Tris and Javier again, had played and sung, invited us in to his simple house to sing an hour's goodbye for his massive family, tears in his eyes as he listened to Katie's song about Colombia.

Singing for the Indians and the Governor of Cauca

While we were in Popayan, the three youngest girls, Katie, Laura and Julie (15 and 12 years old) went to comply with an invitation from the Guambiano Indians to visit their 'mother settlement' an hour away and sing and perform for them. The rest of us were too busy to go. Travelling home after all these events, Katie suddenly pointed to a faded poster on a lamp-post: 'Oh look! that's the Guambiano man I was talking to for hours.' 'WHAT?!' I said, the penny dropping as to why they'd been so insistent that I go to the event in person. 'Oh my goodness, that's the Governor of

the whole of Cauca (the large troubled southern Department on whose borderlands we live). He's very very famous, a brilliant dedicated man in terrible danger from the paramilitaries.' **Floro Tunubala**: a great victory for the indigenous peoples to have him elected, but he governs one of the most threatened Departments. The indigenous peoples have already lost so many leaders as both sides, the FARC and the paras, attack them for their attempt to stay independent and outside of the war.

The boys' remains finally handed over...with a threat

Several days passed since I began this Letter, as on the anniversary of our boys' death, we had the chilling news that the FARC had finally handed over their remains, a bag of bones deposited on a country roadside for a local official to pick up in Cunday, Tolima. With this 'grand gesture' came the threat/warning: ***we are doing this on condition you make no more protests, give out no more leaflets, do not perform any ceremony for the boys in Hoya Grande, and do not erect a commemorative plaque there for them as it would be BAD FOR THE IMAGE OF THE REGION.***

We defy the ban immediately

Have your heart and brain stopped functioning as mine did at this twisted thinking? Anne and Andy went straight down to Icononzo and leafletted all the country buses again immediately with this little notice: **'Today, 9th July 2001, is the first anniversary of the murder of Tristan James and Javier Nova. Neither they nor the Atlantis Community will rest in peace until justice is done.'** Then they left a clear message with our contact man there saying: NO DEAL.

I have now received a 90% illegible Fax from Anne saying she had to go to the forensic dept. in Bogota to help identify the bones. It seems the original stories we heard of how they died are wrong. Each boy had four shotwounds in the head. The angle from which they came showed they were forced to kneel down. Every time more details come, they die again for us and we die a little inside, until outrage once again returns to heal our spirits and our resolve.

The bag of bones contained the remains of several other people as well as parts of Tris and Javier.

Shortly after their deaths a year ago, a clairvoyant had told Anne: it will take 2 years for this matter to be resolved. We're at half time, getting ever more deeply educated in the deep corruption of Colombian institutions of every kind. A public prosecutor assigned to our case tried to bully Anne into *giving away the identity of our informants*: he was more interested in getting an easy 'catch' amongst helpless civilians than dealing with the real criminals. She resisted him absolutely: speaking straight carries its own strength; then the tricks and threats of the 'authorities' collapse in all their shallow mean-mindedness.

A Visit to a Regional Commander of the FARC

The prelude to the handover of the proof of our boys' final agony was a 14 hour journey along rocky unmade-up roads, meeting only one country bus in all that long day, to meet the head of the Tolima FARC.

He looked more like a poet than a guerrillero and was several thousand per cent more civil and concerned than the British Consul in Colombia. He gave us hours of his time and we felt deeply listened to. He agreed that a new young generation of FARC commanders with more military enthusiasm than political consciousness are causing endless trouble for the movement. He began the meeting by thanking me for the letter I had written him. I was baffled. I had written him no letter. Then little by little he jogged my memory and I was astonished: many years ago in Caqueta when our Green campaign first began, I had seen an issue of '*Resistencia*', the underground FARC newsletter for campesinos, which was an excellent 'Green' bulletin: I published most of it in an early Green letter. And then I had written to the Tolima command where it was printed congratulating them on the contents and telling them of our work.

The thin sensitive gentleman in front of me was evidently the author of that Bulletin and he had been very proud to receive my letter, had photocopied it and sent it to all the top leaders of the FARC!

At the meeting, we expressed ourselves fully and clearly and could feel his appreciation. Present were: Anne and myself, Becky, Louise (20) and Laura (15). The two girls sang a few of their very plain- talking and moving songs before we left. The main question we were asked was what exactly we wanted to happen to the murderers and what action we wanted the FARC to take. We will be investigating to see whether the latest: 'shut up and be satisfied' message comes from this man, which is very difficult to believe, or from lower down, which we suspect.

***Resistance is public and political,
It confronts the bloody face
of militarism and money.
Defies Moloch
pitiless idol of power and wealth
ever hungry for sacrifice,
for our children's blood.***

Brian Quail, Trident Ploughshares

British Embassy Aid in Kidnap of my grandson Brendan

The reason Becky is in Colombia is because the British Embassy saw fit to organize the 'legal' kidnap of her son Brendan, whom Louise and I had rescued - with the help of the Colombian Army - from Hoya Grande where he was living next door to his brother's murderers. The Embassy NEVER intervened when he was in real danger, but waited until he was safely in Bogota with Anne. Then they pounced, at the bidding of his biological father who had not seen him for 13 years (an ex-nuclear weapons scientist). We have never been allowed to see Brendan again. It is as simple, as unbelievable, and as outrageous as that.

Tristan died to keep contact with his brother, taking our beloved Javier with him. Presumably this is part of the British Government's 'Plan Colombia'. They hate us because we oppose them, and their murderous fumigations of the forests (under the hypocritical label of a fictitious 'drug war'). They found a neat revenge. But Brendan is 15. He will return if and when he wants to. Our fight with the British lapdogs of American foreign policy will continue. Along the way, we have also had to witness, aghast, the subservience of Colombian institutions - in this case the 'security police' (DAS) and the illnamed 'Children's Welfare Dept.' - to the British Empire, which is alive and well and functioning smoothly in Colombia, thank you very much. I trust there are no thinking people with illusions as to the nature of Mr. Blair's government.

***Resistance is not just then and for heroes,
Resistance is now too;
and it's for me and it's for you.***

Brian Quail

To all our dear Readers: thank you for staying with us in this long and harrowing tale. We need, appreciate and are encouraged by you and all your wonderful letters of support. Thank you also especially to my old friend Heather Strange of Shropshire and to Mr. Joseph Judge of the USA for magnificent gifts of seeds. Our Green work may not make headline news, but it goes on daily, unabated.

With love to you all,

Jenny James,
Atlantis Ecological Campaign.

