

"Tools of the farmer's trade encircle the tree, saying, 'Move us if you dare!'" (See cover photo)

Thou preparast a table before me,
In the presence of mine enemies.

The image of state troopers dragging me to a waiting squad car, handcuffing me, delivering me for weeks of dull blandness in jail, and leaving me with a not too favorable dossier in the FBI files, would normally be a nightmare worthy of my worst paranoia. I have long hair, raise vegetables on a communal farm, live an unconventional lifestyle. Few people understand what I and my homesteading friends are all about, especially policemen. Yet most people accept what we are, especially farmers. We actually have much in common with other farmers, including the things we want to preserve in this area.

I feel a little giddy, a little chilly, but I feel no fear. I look below me, at the smiling, grateful faces of supporters. I would never be here if they were not there. We make jokes about PASNY and their present predicament. Alan sends me a container of soup he made last night. Jane Standing Still climbs the ladder and throws it to me. She is an Indian who has clutched this tree more devotedly than any white.

A tractor pulls into the Barse barnyard. I can make out the hat of a farmer named Bud Rust. His wife was arrested yesterday. People are scurrying about. Puzzled, I watch them hitch a haywagon to his tractor. I laugh and cry as Bud charges across the snowy field, wheels in under the tree, parks the wagon below me, and zooms off to hook up a manure spreader. Another farm wagon is also deposited under the tree. Tools of the farmer's trade encircle the tree, saying, "Move us if you dare!" The PASNY foreman, Pietras, is furious. Power to the farmers! Thank you, Bud Rust.

Apparently he thinks PASNY cannot legally touch the machinery. It reminds me of the town in France where every single farmer fought against a new military base. They paraded around town on hundreds of tractors, and pastured their sheep under the Eiffel Tower.

Hour after chilly hour passes. Peggy gets painfully stiff and climbs down. A TV man films the tree and the PASNY boys. Soon it will be dark, and the possibility of escaping looks better, as I jump around to keep warm.

False optimism, born of the uniqueness of this day. It is now six hours since I climbed up here. Someone sights a yellow-and-blue troopers' car pulling into the right-of-way. More cars with bubble-gum machines, perhaps a dozen. This is it. People come running out of the farmhouse. Jane Standing Still scampers up the ladder. My eyes follow my chosen route up through the tree. I breathe deeply, and start to climb.

I happen to glance down at the mob of cops and officials, just as someone points at Alan, mumbles something about positive identification, and he is suddenly plucked from the line of spectators, amazement and disbelief on his innocent face. "What, me?" I can hear him thinking. "I haven't been interfering with your stupid destruction of life!"

I'm stiff from not moving much, and I climb awkwardly. From her perch below me Jane Standing Still curses the traitorous Akwesasne Police. A state trooper climbs the ladder, but she refuses to desert the tree. Two cops climb into the bucket of the cherry picker, which hoists them up to her perch. She makes them drag her out of the tree.

I am using what feels like the last of my strength to squirm up into a high crotch of the tree. The rope I am carrying keeps tangling around my legs. I look down. Two policemen are slowly inching higher in the hand of the cherry picker. It is my turn to be the cherry. I look up. The branches above me are becoming too small to risk climbing. But finally the arm of the machine is straight, and the troopers are still below me!

A heavy wind is blowing. I sway over their heads. In our own little world, isolated high above the waiting crowd, the three of us converse politely for several minutes. We are all freezing. We discuss how dangerous it would be for all of us, if I choose not to cooperate. I know they will not give up until they have me somehow.

It seems like there must be some kind of protocol or ritual that we should be following here. I ask them to show me the warrant for my arrest. "We'll do that when we reach the ground. Now c'mon!"

I insist. He takes it out of his pocket and waves it at my feet. "Can you read it too me?" I ask. Apparently, this must seem like a legitimate request, even at forty-five feet from the Earth. He locates the part applicable to me. It is a description of my clothing. "Well, I'm not going to resist, but you'll have to take me."

Finally he climbs out of the bucket and pulls himself up my limb far enough to

take my foot. I go down with him. To go limp, the standard technique of civil disobedience, doesn't seem quite appropriate here.

After a long descent in a very over-crowded bucket, we perform the usual rituals: three of them carrying me to a squad car; handcuffing; polite conversation about this powerline not being too good but gotta have the energy don't liketa haveta arrest you people but gotta feed the wife and kids Mr. Jones what do you mean I could quit the troopers and buy a farm?

Most of the time, I sit in silence. How could I even begin to explain?

I can see that others are being arrested — Indian people. Don Richmond, spokesperson for the Mohawk Nation, is placed in the same car as me. He knows how to talk to these guys. By the time we reach Malone, he has them practically worshipping his People and professing sympathy for their struggles. But such words come too easy; the actions tell all — this conversation comes only fifteen minutes after we watch Jane Running Doe, out on bail since yesterday, arrested for just being on the Barse land, hundreds of feet from the tree. No warrant. A young Indian man is also grabbed for no apparent reason. His coat sleeve is torn off as he whips around in surprise. This seems to justify roughing him up a bit.

Of course, everyone stays around for the grand finale, as Frenchy goes at the tree at long last. Sawdust spurts out of the out like wooden blood. At any moment, I expect to see him stop, examine his chain, and find the teeth all chipped, for I know that someone pounded some nails into the tree last night. But not enough, I guess; he makes quick work of the tree. She crashes in agony among clouds of snow, not far from our squad car. The PASNY boys have gotten their rocks off at last. But it has cost them dearly. We drive away to the County Courthouse.

We who stood here know that this is not PASNY's victory. The story of this battle is rolling off the presses throughout the state. We are more united than ever, and many sympathizers are overcoming their apathy or defeatism. The powerline will never go through.

And the tree lives. After draping her with an American flag, people take scions from her frozen branches, for grafting onto young elm stock in spring. And bark is taken, from which the Indians will make healing medicine. In many ways, this noble organism has died, that others may live.

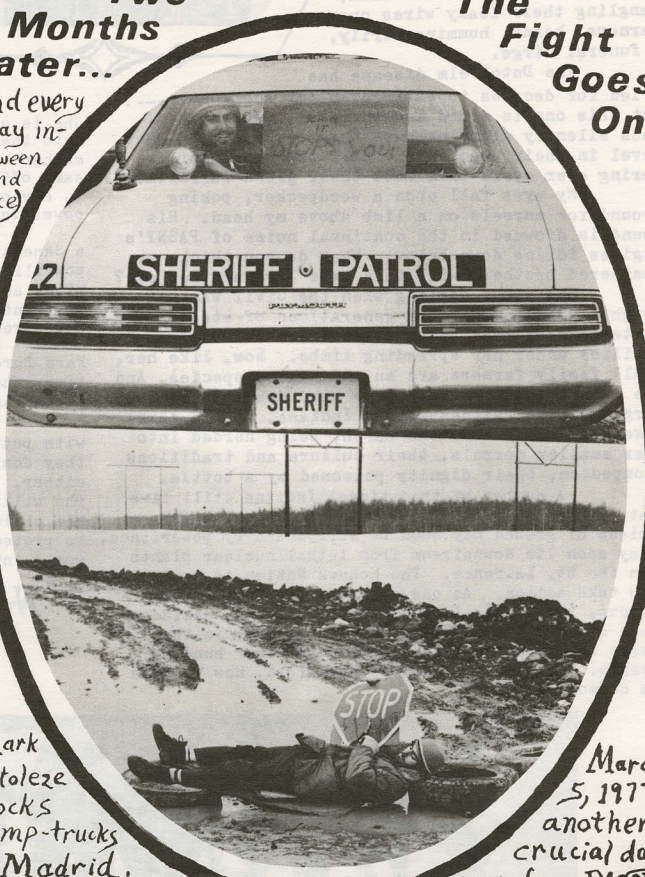
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us

All the days of our lives

As we dwell, reverently, in the house of the Lord,
Forever.

Two Months Later... (and every day in-between and since)

The Fight Goes On



Mark Pistoleze blocks dump-trucks in Madrid.

March 5, 1977, another crucial day won from PASNY



THE TREE LIVES

by doug jones

The Earth is my Mother;
I shall not want.
She maketh me to lie down in Her
green pastures,
She leadeth me beside Her still waters
She restoreth my soul.
And in return I vow
To keep Her whole,
To preserve the beauty of Her
many garments,
The fertility of Her fields,
And the life of her wonderful creatures.

Friday is dawning at the Barse Farm, as we begin the fifth cold January day of our stand. We have been shielding an old yet solid elm tree from the gouging teeth of the chain saw.

A large crew of the State Power Authority and its subcontractors have sat in their idling four-wheel-drive vehicles all week, burning up gas and patience, while those who till this soil and love this North Country have defended the tree. Some have gone to jail for their love. Many more of us will probably have to go.

Sadly, we watch the weak smoldering of what was to be a giant bonfire, thrown up across the mouth of PASNY's stolen right-of-way through the meadows of the Barse Farm. Before dawn, this huge pile of tree limbs was hauled out of the snowdrifts, with hopes of holding back the work crews for a few more hours.

We are already beginning to feel desparate. It is only 8:30, and we must make it through this day — the elm tree must stand! Tomorrow we can regroup our forces at the non-violence workshop, to be ready on Monday for a firmer stand.

Some of our people, scarves shielding their faces from PASNY's tattle-tale cameras, stoke the fire with kindling and old tires. But the wood is damp, and the wind refuses to blow the right way. We can hear the throaty diesel voice of the log-skidder revving up. Soon our barricade will be gone. Adrenalin surges.

Our ranks are depleted by yesterday's arrests. Quietly, we ask each other who is willing to stand between the chain saw and the tree, and go to jail. Most of us have other responsibilities. I, for example, am photographing all this. The public must be made aware of just how far these farmers will go to keep their farms and their way of life.

Only one of us is willing to be arrested. If he places his body against that tree, an injunction will be thrown at him. The cops will appear with a warrant for him before noon. "Frenchy" will be right behind them with his saw.

I run back to the farmhouse to see if any reinforcements have arrived...Someone is thinking today. So simple. A person should climb into the tree. They couldn't cut it down, they couldn't even serve an injunction on the climber!

A volunteer has already stepped forth. New hope. We have a new trick. Gratefully, I hug this new player in our drama. A long ladder is taken out to the tree.

The skidder finishes scraping away the dead bonfire, then takes its place at the head of a long parade of vehicles, rolling ominously down the right-of-way toward the majestic elm. Among them I spy a giant "cherry picker", designed to hoist a worker high into a tree. Peggy is 20 feet up, on the lowest limb, not as immune to their clutches as we thought. But PASNY seems puzzled. Only the police can touch her, with a fresh warrant in their hands. The tree has a few hours at most, I guess.

The PASNY boys engage in their endless huddles. I wander around, my camera busy, dealing them a little of their own medicine. I size up the cherry picker.

Hmmmm. That thing looks like it won't reach more than 40 feet up. I gaze into the tree, studying the limbs.

Elms are not easy to climb. Their large lower limbs part from each other almost vertically. But I wonder if someone might still get beyond the reach of that machine? If this tree could only be spared till dark — that would get us through the weekend.

A few minutes later, friends of the tree again raise the ladder. Just why this is happening, I cannot say, but soon I find myself up above Peggy, working my way higher through the massive limbs of the elm tree. I take my time, studying different routes up several major limbs, surveying the length of the cherry picker's folded hydraulic arm, picturing it trying to reach me as I move around the upper branches.

If I can stay up here until dark, maybe I can climb down and run to Moeller's farm, a mile down the right-of-way. Fantasies of life as a fugitive. But they probably can't identify me from the distant photographs they're shooting now. Jail holds no attraction for me. It does get publicity. But I'd like to have my cake and eat it too.

Soon after I have settled into a perch, Frenchy picks up his saw and mounts the cherry-picker bucket, while PASNY performs their injunction show for the cameras. Xeroxed injunctions fly around like confetti, thrown at the tree to "serve"



"Some have gone to jail for their love. Many more of us will probably have to go."

Peggy and me, thrown at John Doe's and Jane Doe's and even reporters, who have moved off the right-of-way, as requested. I try to hide my face from their cameras. Wedged awkwardly in a crotch of the tree, I keep shifting my weight from one stiff leg to the other. PASNY retreats to their tonka toys. Lunchtime.

Yea though I walk through
the valley of the
shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
For thou art with me.
Thy ancient trees and
reverent children,
They comfort me.

I am forty feet from the ground. I can see a mile or two through the winter haze, over the low, blue-white, rolling fields, good farmland. Hundreds of elms, young and old, rise above fencerows, tangled in curling grapevines. Below me are the crews responsible to an arrogant, especially privileged utility. Their bosses in Albany want to put monstrous towers here, that would reach four times higher than my present altitude.

It is plain to me now that those ugly lattice-work giants would be seen from at least five miles away, marching across our fair land, dangling their leaky wires over farmers' heads, humming eerily, a funeral dirge.

The Dutch elm disease has tried for decades to extinguish our American elm, but this one is sound and thriving, thousands of buds silently sleeping away the icy days. My eyes revel in their plenitude. Will the warmth of spring ever swell them into their green fulfillment?

My eyes fall upon a woodpecker, poking around for morsels on a limb above my head. His sound is drowned in the continual noise of PASNY's engines idling down below. What do you think, my feathered brother, will this tree live another day?

She was a sapling when the Civil War was fought. She has watched generations of steadfast white farmers tend these meadows and raise big families under her spreading limbs. Now, like her, small family farmers are an endangered species. And the generation of elms before her, dwellers of the virgin forest, witnessed the Indians, gentle caretakers of our Mother the Earth, being herded into ever smaller corrals, their culture and traditions stomped on, their dignity poisoned by a bottle.

A number of traditional Indians still live at Akwesasne, five miles from here. Their tiny piece of ground may soon be surrounded by powerlines, may soon lie downstream from lethal nuclear plants on the St. Lawrence. The Mohawk Nation is beginning to take action. As one of their people told our group, "The injustice you now fight, the reckless use of so-called 'eminent domain' powers, is the same injustice we have suffered for four hundred years. Now you know how we have felt, now we have a common enemy."

"There is only one danger for
PASNY'S tax-free bond-holders
to reckon with:
WE THE PEOPLE!"



Strangely, the white settlers who cleared this land and reaped its fruits, are the ancestors of many of the workmen who wait to cut this tree today — also many of the police who have to do the utility's dirty work, hauling away friends and cousins to jail. We often hear them say, "I don't like to do this, but it's my job, I have to feed my kids." We try to make them see that soon there won't be any good food left to feed their kids. This powerline would rip through the heart of the North Country's best farmland. Someplace inside, many of them understand, but official propaganda pits them against us — their jobs against our farmland. Utilities neglect alternative energy sources — more jobs but less profit per million dollars invested. Research on the dangers of PASNY's technologies is squelched. Serious dangers for all of us, loggers, masons, steelworkers, farmers. There is only one danger for PASNY's tax-free bond-holders to reckon with: **WE THE PEOPLE.**

Local people will admit that these lines will be nothing but trouble. But many feel powerless. How long will it be — not long, I bet — before they realize that a unified citizenry can stop the greatest tyranny? The people who are going to jail here are not young idealistic radicals. We are farmers and mothers and ministers.

Yesterday, at fourteen below zero, we watched the troopers haul away old Stella Barse from the elm tree she was guarding on her land. She is almost blind. She brought thirteen children into the world. One of them, Martha, herself a mother of four, was arrested later in the day for the same offense. She and her mother often say that God is obviously at work here, that this nightmarish powerline will never go through.

Yesterday, they nabbed "Jane Running Doe," a Seneca Indian, healer and mother of four, while her powerline sister, Margaret, was being arrested, 30 miles away. Together, two weeks ago, they had stepped in front of a running chain saw, after the workman had already cut into the tree.

After Jane, they dragged away the wife of a Farm Bureau director, again a mother. At Christmas time, three local women spent four days away from their families, in the Franklin County Jail.

I don't think that PASNY has a preoccupation with putting mothers in jail. On the other hand, they don't seem too concerned about the bad publicity either. I wonder if it ever occurred to them that the willingness of so many mothers to stand before the chainsaws might originate in a mother's instinct to protect her children from evil, from the hideous world into which the energy-monsters are leading us?

"Now, like this elm tree,
small family farmers are
an endangered species."

