

I Turned into a Teenage Earth First!er

Growing up in the Movement

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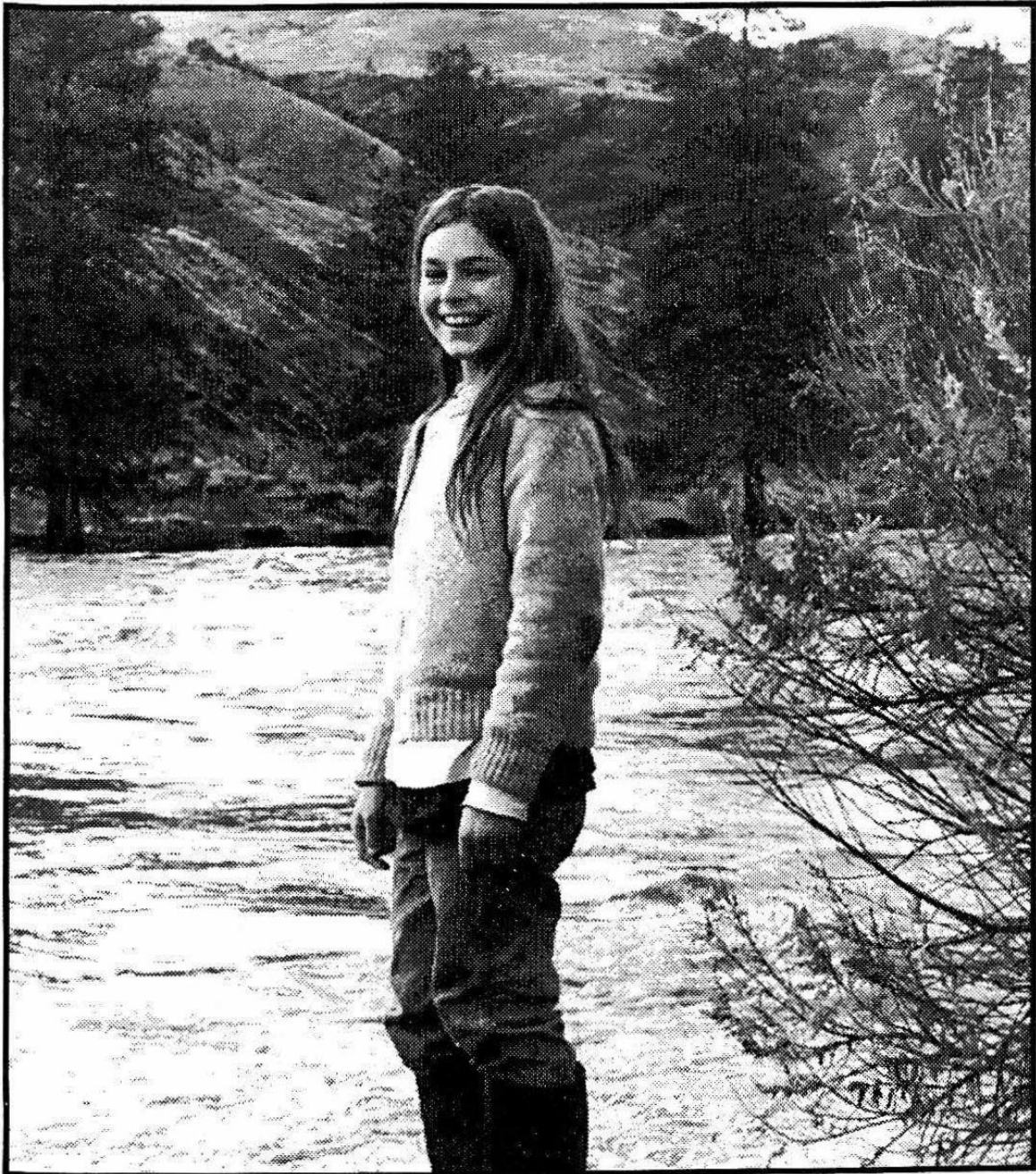


photo by Karen Coulter

The author at the John Day River at flood stage in 1996

I attended my first Round River Rendezvous in 1988 at age three. This one stands out in my memory over the other seven that I have attended because of the post-Rondy action at the Okanogan Ranger Station. My memory of this event is very hazy, but I remember that my mom and dad were brutally arrested and that I was really scared. I am told that the reason I was scared was that I saw police dogs being used to arrest

my mom, and that my dad handed me to a friend moments before he too was hauled away. I am upset that I can't really remember this because he died shortly thereafter. I also remember that I had to stay with friends while my parents were in jail, and that someone talked to me about my fear of the police. This probably helped me a lot, as my fear of the police is no more intense than anyone else's in the movement. I consider the Okanogan action to be my first demonstration although I am told I was at three Greenpeace actions before I was a year old.

Since 1988, I have been to seven more Rendezvous, Cove/Mallard, Warner Creek, Watch Mountain, Fall Creek and multiple actions. Throughout this time it could be said that I was "growing up in the movement," as the first house I can remember was a Seattle crash house and the next two places where I have lived have been EF! landtrusts. My mom, Karen Coulter, has also been very involved and overworked as an EF! activist for as long as I can remember.

Throughout the time I have been involved with the movement, I have seen more than the rowdiness and drunkenness that might be considered a problem for a kid growing up in EF!. There are problems with being raised in this type of environment. Everyone is often stressed out and depressed, for while we do have our victories, we are fighting an uphill battle and have more losses than wins. Another major problem is the absence of kids my age. I personally consider this to be the worst problem as I have lived most of my life homeschooled in an isolated part of Eastern Oregon. While growing up around weird EF!ers could be said to make you grow up faster, it also makes you cynical and hard to relate to for people your own age.

Of course there are benefits to growing up in Earth First!, such as the sense of community it provides. The reason that people form such things as bridge clubs or comics conventions is, I believe, to be a part of a greater community—something our movement does much better. It's nice to know our form of community's purpose is to do something more important than learning a new form of macramé! Other pro's of growing up with our happy riffraff is the added knowledge of all things nature-wise, as well as diverse social interactions. Many city kids I know are unlikely to have a lot of conversations with grownups that are more than social niceties, while I consider a conversation on forest ecology or the physics of a tripod to be meaningful. Another plus to growing up in EF! is that kids who have not grown up in the movement are likely to be taken aback by our wonderful chaos, since city life is based on privacy and cleanliness, both of which our movement throws into happy reckless abandon.

You might be wondering why growing up in the movement is such an important issue to warrant this article. Besides being asked to write on this subject, I consider this to be important because of the high rate of burnout in older activists. While I can't guarantee that your kids will grow up to be just like me when they're fifteen (that's a good thing), I do imagine that they will be more receptive to EF! issues if they are brought up in our culture. All in all, I think that growing up in the movement is a good thing as it gives kids cool people to be around, important issues to work on,

and, in the long run, could make them into better people. Have fun and keep up the fight!

Sasha Coulter Callies is an EF! magician based in Eastern Oregon.



photo by Karen Coulter

Sasha with his father, activist George Callies, at a 1987 regional EF! rendezvous in Washington's Olympic Mountains

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