

Naked in the Woods

By Suzanne Remien

Every so often in life you witness something that affects you totally differently than what you were prepared to experience. That was my situation when I attended the Forest Protection Committee meeting at the Loma Prieta Chapter office two months ago in Palo Alto.

The guest speaker was Jack Gescheidt, founder of the Tree Spirit Project and a photographer who tastefully photographs beautiful trees with people posing “in the buff” while passionately embracing a tree. Initially, I thought to myself, I am not sure this kind of “tree art” is for me. However, I found I was wrong. I was fully inspired by the end of his presentation.

Gescheidt photographs, some in black and white and others in color, will typically frame a tree of massive size, with posed bodies hugging the limbs or on the ground beneath the tree. What the photos convey is a poignant one-ness, displaying a spiritual connection with the trees and the natural world.

However, it is not just the photographs that entice the audience, but the passion with which Mr. Gescheidt speaks about how we as humans are interconnected with trees and need to protect them in order to save ourselves and our planet. He states that, “We will not survive the greatest challenge we humans have ever faced—anthropogenic climate change, aka human-caused global warming—without the world’s forests”. His message was artistic, scientific and inspirational.

He spoke about deforestation from animal agriculture, and how soil disturbance is the biggest source of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. He pointed out that when disturbed, forest soils lose carbon quickly, from the prompt decay of organic material. As an example, he related that in parts of the Pacific Northwest, a forest that has been clear-cut and then replanted with pine seedlings can continue to release CO₂ for up to 20 years due to the soil disturbance.

Probably the most interesting topic he brought up was on the recent debate of “Invasion Biology”, that holds that non-native species of animals and plants are detrimental and must be stopped using toxic pesticides, whereby chemical companies yield large profits in the new business of exterminating “invasive” species in wild areas. He cited a book called “The New Wild” by Fred Pearce, who questions assumptions about non-native plants. He challenges the conventional belief that they need to be eradicated.

Gescheidt gave the example of eucalyptus trees in California brought over from Australia. Eucalyptus trees are thought to be highly flammable, and partly to blame for the Oakland hills firestorm of 1991. However, recent information suggests that this is not true. In September of this year, a Federal Court ruling denied the City of Oakland \$5.7 million in FEMA funds to cut down eucalyptus trees stating that eucalyptus forests were not the cause of the fire, and that massive acres of grass and brush were instead what caused the

fire to burn out of control. As backup evidence of this scenario, Gescheidt displayed a photo of the Scripps Ranch Fire near San Diego in 2003 which burned 150 homes to the ground, but did not burn any of the surrounding eucalyptus trees directly adjacent to those homes.

As Jack Gescheidt mentioned in his mission statement, www.Tresspiritproject.com, the Tree Spirit Project is many things; a compilation of fine art photographs depicting people and trees together in their natural state, an artistic and activist promotion for the preservation of trees, as well as an opportunity to participate with other people in sharing our connection to trees.

Suzanne Remein is a member of the Forest Proteciton Committee of the Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club.