



nature's fight for survival

by Julia M. Chiarella-Genoni

*"...Perhaps the final act was meant, To clinch a lifetime's argument,
That nothing comes from violence and nothing ever could, For all those
born beneath an angry star, Lest we forget how fragile we are..."* –
Fragile, Sting

Could you ever imagine a world where English suddenly ceased to exist? Where romantic French words were gone forever, in an instant? Where beautiful Italian phrases were never heard again? Of course not. It's impossible to imagine a person's native tongue and culture as something that can no longer be. It's who you are; it's what you have lived with. No matter where you go, it will stay with you because it is part of the world you know.

This is not the case for everyone. For some, their language has disappeared off the face of the earth, their homes are now roads, and their cultures have died alongside them. Staggering thoughts, but, 100% true. However, it is possible for some languages to 'disappear' in this world. **It is estimated that half of the world's languages (3,000) will disappear within the next century.**

Extinction takes its toll. More extinction of tribal peoples has occurred in the 20th century than in any other in human history. Development has been used as an excuse to take over the land of indigenous people. Land clearing for cattle pasture, damming of rivers, mining, and logging of timber are all examples of what one calls 'development'. Poverty, debt and shortage of good farming

land are some of the many reasons for rainforest destruction. For example, in Madagascar people are forced to clear the forest and use it for farming to feed their families. With this, in time, the land produces less and people are forced to clear more rainforest to plant new crops. It's a vicious circle that can be helped only through education. Another staggering fact: each year, humankind uses 130 million tonnes of rainforest timber, and 11 million hectares of tropical forests are destroyed. **Calculate that as an area the size of a football field cut down every single second.** This is the reality.

To see the rainforests is to see a place untouched, perfect in its simplicity, a place that most have only read about. A place that is rich in beauty, bountiful in nature, and luscious in wildlife. The people run freely, some naked; they intricately paint their faces with bright colours and ornament their bodies. The animals are those that can only be imagined, in a wilderness that is golden. Virgin lands, a world in the past, living and breathing nature; earth is their family; they know where they come from and how to live in harmony with their surrounding nature, their planet. Authentic, with very little contact with our world, the developed world outside, this is the Garden of Eden, a paradise here on earth.

Not only are the rainforests beautiful, they are beneficial to everyone. There is great knowledge that is still to be found in the rainforests with regards to medicines and environmental sustainability.



A recent study found that of 119 commercially useful plant based drugs available in the West, 74% of these were in prior use by indigenous communities. To destroy these areas, is to possibly destroy a cure for an illness, without even knowing. And of all the available freshwater in the world, 20% of it is found in the Amazon. These places are the most vulnerable and ecologically unique virgin rainforests and they need all the protection they can get in order to stay that way. With this in mind, in 1989, the chief of the Indian tribes of lower Xingu took action by enlisting Sting and Jean-Pierre Dutilleux (film maker, Indian activist, and old friend of Sting's) to help save his world.

At that point and time, Sting was already known as one of the most unique and highly respected performers in the 20th century. Many artists would have basked in their own glory instead of helping out a foreign cause. But, Sting didn't jump back, relax, and forget about the rest of the world. In fact, he did the very opposite. While his career was on its very pinnacle, he set out and made a difference in other areas of the world. It was in that year that Sting travelled to the Amazon in Brazil at the request of Chief Raoni.

Chief Raoni had asked for money to create a park by mapping out a clear border around lands. This would enable the land to be a preservation site instead of a landmark for good lumber. The more

mapped territory, the more preserved, therefore causing less land to be destroyed. Chief Raoni wanted the world to know of its existence so it could survive. It worked; that same year Sting and his wife, Trudie Styler established the Rainforest Foundation.

Based in London, the RF is a non-governmental organisation and registered charity, and works closely with local partner groups, supporting indigenous peoples in their struggle for rights to land and livelihood. Their focus is assisting indigenous peoples in fulfilling their own needs. These can range from projects that promote their legal lands rights, to programmes promoting community forestry, agricultural self-sufficiency or teacher training. The RF-UK's work is focused in Central Africa, Madagascar, and South America. Their work, collectively with a network of other organisations, spans all major tropical rainforests.

By disseminating information packages in the UK about rainforests and indigenous peoples' issues to both adults and children, as well as an impressive and informative website, the RF is reaching many people. A quarterly newsletter is also published, that covers recent and upcoming events, new findings and goals. Annual events that help to raise money for the RF's work with indigenous communities include a 10K run in London, this year on November 9th, and a wildlife art exhibition (October) that will be selling artwork of wildlife artists. ▲

www.rainforestfoundationuk.org