



## Plan B

by **Briana Westmacott** Hailing from NorCal, Briana has lived in Santa Barbara for the past fifteen years. While she is indeed an adjunct faculty member at SBCC and has contributed to *LOVEmikana*, *Wake & Wander* and *Entrée Magazine*, much of her time is spent multi-tasking her way through days as a mother, wife, sister, want-to-be chef and travel junky. Writing is an outlet that ensures mental stability... usually.

## The World Could Use More Warblers



The Warbler, at home in the trees, saving the Valley. Photograph © 2013 Jack Gescheidt, TreeSpiritProject.com

**T**here really is a Lorax; I saw her with my own eyes. She was perched high in an 80-foot-tall Ponderosa Pine tree for over two months with two sleeping bags and a tarp. (Yeah, you read that right.) And she called herself “The Warbler.” (That too.)

The Warbler was conducting a tree sit. What, pray tell, is a tree sit? It’s a peaceful protest that involves camping high in a treetop for a sometimes extended period of time. In the case of The Warbler, there was a massive road and *many* trees involved... and one brave girl trying to force change.

The 24 year old was standing up – or sitting down, mostly – to the interests behind a \$200 million freeway bypass by Caltrans that is currently being constructed in Willits, California (my hometown). I had taken the kids up north over their Spring Break for some rest and relaxation, and we heard about The Warbler while we were there. We decided to go see her and learn a bit more about her story, and ultimately found ourselves truly admiring her passion and dedication. She was fighting, non-violently, for what she believes in. And she alone was causing a serious hiccup in the freeway construction plans, not to mention real concern in the big interests behind them.

Not bad for a girl in a tree.

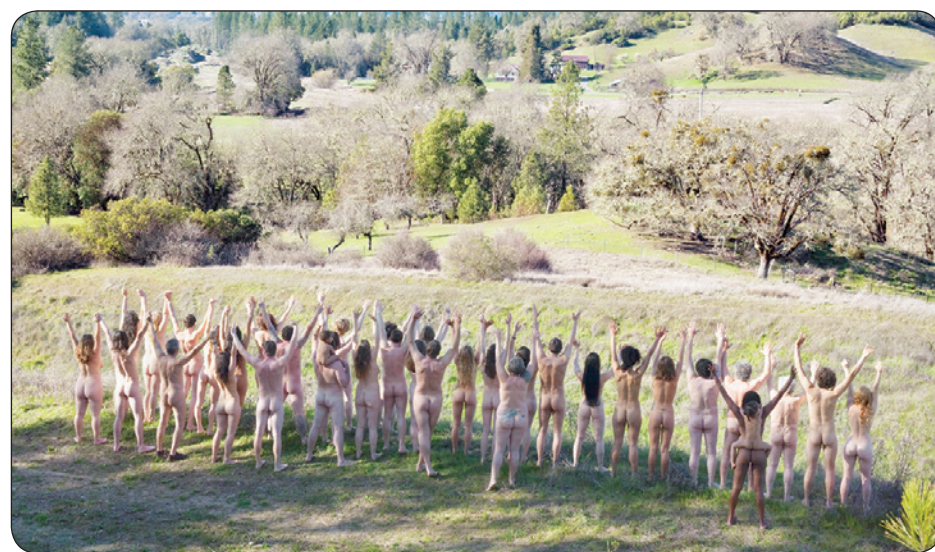
(By the way, can you imagine a Warbler

in Santa Barbara for every objectionable development project? There would undoubtedly be a robust, interconnected community of well-heeled tree-dwelling protesters from Summerland to Goleta. Can you pass the Grey Poupon?)

### A Girl in a Tree

When I was a kid, I conducted my own tree sit (of sorts). While I was not protesting anything that involved tax dollars, I did in fact climb to the tip-top of a tree to protest what I recall to be *everything* that my parents were enforcing (I was seven years old and let’s just say a bit rebellious even then). This could have involved any number of issues including the fact that my parents bought a piece of land and moved my sisters and me out to the middle of nowhere, with nothing – I’m serious here, we had nothing. No electricity, no house (it was in the process of being built) and no civilization anywhere in sight (except maybe from the top of that tree I sat in).

“You can’t get me!” I hollered down with delight, and I was entirely right. There was no conceivable way for them to retrieve me. I was tiny enough to nimbly creep sixty feet up and they were too big to follow. I sat and looked down at my family all day long, while they were yelling and fussing and coercing to all ends. I sat until the sunset and then I



Nude people do more than just run around in the woods in Willits; they get naked to actually save the woods in Willits. Bravo! Photograph © 2013 Jack Gescheidt, TreeSpiritProject.com

got too hungry and cold (I was probably nude, we often ran around the land in the buff – this was decidedly *not* out of the ordinary in Willits in the early ‘80s) so I shimmied down the branches. I can readily admit that I’m not now and was not then nearly as tough as The Warbler; food and warmth and comfort do indeed make me happy.

With that said, my tree sit was a reasonable success. I was able to successfully utilize that very same threat for years and years (“I’ll climb right back up there, I swear.”)

And they knew I wasn’t bluffing.

### (Socially Active) Peaks and (Apathetic) Valleys

People have a great deal of power (and so do their bare butts). My parents are Baby Boomers and they did their fair share of shaking things up (often in the buff) during the ‘60s and ‘70s with Woodstock and war protests that will forever go down in history. My generation didn’t really have much to deliver as far as our protesting power. We were slightly doomed with the title “Generation X” and we’ll forever be tagged as the MTV generation. Now we have the Millennials, whom we will have to watch to see just what they can do.

I must say, however, that I admire the tenacity that The Warbler exhibited. (From what I’ve witnessed, many Millennials seem only to take action on YouTube.) And she wasn’t alone; I also commend those who exposed their behinds for the sake of keeping the “Living Valley” alive.

We – myself included – could all take a little stronger stance (naked or not) on issues that should not be ignored. Stand up, people, and be sure to look down at the footprints that you are making. Small changes can be large victories and go a long way toward better preserving our earth.

### The Warbler Comes Back to Earth

On our long drive back from Willits my youngest daughter Lila continued to check in with the inquiry, “What world are we in now, Momma?” Her question inspired me to think far beyond our literal location. I like to believe we are in a world where people truly care for our earth. A world in which, individually, we can each make a difference – especially if we are collectively aware. And I’m grateful that this is a world where a lone girl can speak for the trees, even if only for a little while.

Unfortunately, you see, The Warbler was recently removed from her tree, which was cut down that very same day.

One person can make a difference, y’all, but many people can make a bigger one. Maybe what Willits needed was more Warblers, more Loraxes, to make an even bigger statement. One that could not be ignored.

Maybe that’s what it will take to preserve our beautiful Santa Barbara someday.

(You can find out more about the current status and issues surrounding the Willits Caltrans project at [www.savelittlelakevalley.org](http://www.savelittlelakevalley.org).)

## Briana’s Best Bets

**A**re you inspired to tree sit? Or maybe you are looking for other forms of environmental activism within the SB area? If so, The Community Environmental Council is a fabulous resource. The CEC has been laying the groundwork for local environmental issues for the past 41 years. Bravo, CEC, your work truly deserves our appreciation! Visit their site ([www.cecsb.org](http://www.cecsb.org)), they have plenty of volunteer projects for you to partner with.

Notably, we thank Jack Gescheidt for sharing his photos with the Sentinel. His work captures an intimacy between humans and nature that is truly remarkable. Please visit Jack Gescheidt’s website, [www.treespiritproject.com](http://www.treespiritproject.com), to view more of his environmental art and upcoming projects.