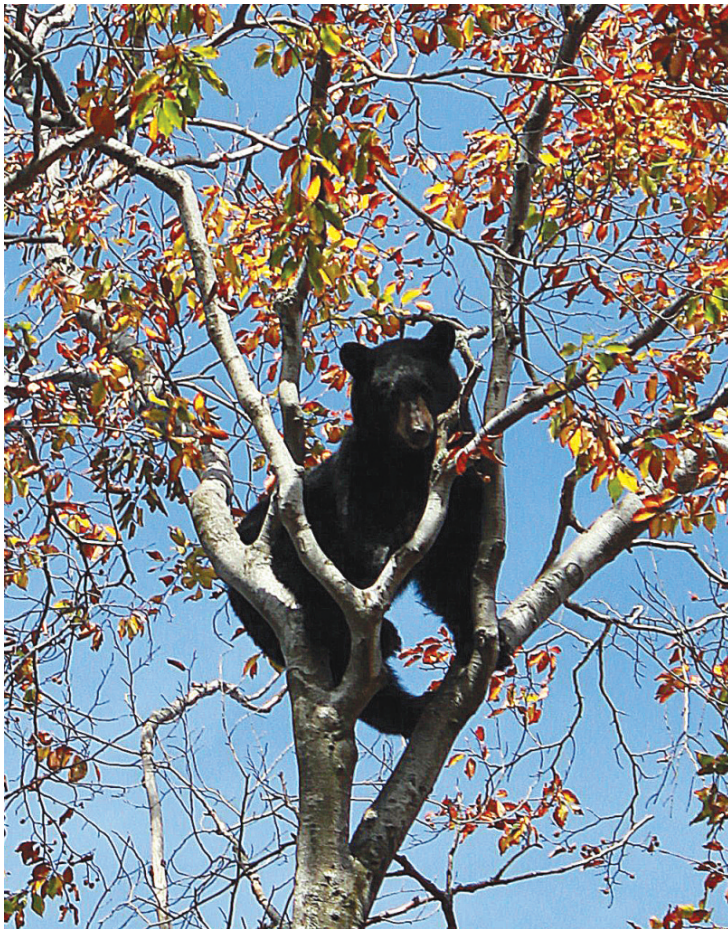


Greed and the art of sharing



By Nate Smelle

HUMAN BEINGS ARE AMONG the most resilient animals on earth, I thought to myself as I marched with more than 400,000 fellow tree huggers on New York City at the recent Peoples' Climate March on Sept. 21. The following day thousands of these vocal visionaries floated across the city like a school of fish to continue their campaign for a better world at the Flood Wall Street demonstration. First approaching the accumulation of activists from a distance, I followed the sound of the drums that echoed through the concrete canyons. As I neared the scene I could here the voice of the crowd chanting. ?Hey! Hey! Ho! Ho! Corporate greed has got to go.? Still without a visual of where exactly the assemblage had formed I walked between the barricades set up by the NYPD earlier that day. Lined with officers clad in riot gear on horses and on foot, the blockades seemed to steer any human traffic heading towards the noise away from its source. Camouflaging myself among a small troop of curious suits also wanting to observe the spectacle I managed to get myself behind the line and into the massive party set up in the middle of Wall Street.

When some of the activists began pushing back the barricades to open up the street to more demonstrators late on the scene, officers responded with a blast of pepper spray fired into the faces of those in the first few rows. As the demonstrators scattered backwards away from the burning sensation on the breeze, most of the individuals on the frontline who took in a an eyeful, instantly fell to the ground writhing in pain. By the end of the night more than 100 people had been hauled away in buses and arrested. Still the singing, the drumming and the dancing persisted well into the night after the prisoners were removed. Once the NYPD's caravan of buses pulled away from the scene I began to meander my way back to the subway through the maze of steel fences preventing the free flow of travel in Manhattan. Turning a corner I all of a sudden found myself face to face with Arturo Di Modica's iconic Charging Bull. Lucky for me the dangerous bronze beast was already behind bars, serving a life sentence for giving Bernie Madoff a free ride to the top of the pyramid back in the mid-1980s. Sitting on the E-Train, heading back to Queens I struck up a conversation with a

gentleman named Tony who was also riding the rails that I had seen at the Flood Wall Street demo a couple hours before. Asking him why he had attended the monumental occasion, he told me that he had been living on the streets of New York for most of his adult life after he lost his job as a sound technician back when Ronald Reagan was in the Oval Office. "Old Ronald made a real mess of things for us poor folks," he said. "For some reason a lot of us bought into what he was selling. Hell, I voted for him. He was a good actor, but he didn't really care about us. All he really cared about was making more money for him and his buddies." When I asked him where he was staying for the night he just smiled and looked at the empty seat on the train.

Walking back to the hostel dorm where I was staying I thought about Tony, and all of the questions I could have asked him. I wondered what it must have been like for him when hurricane Sandy ravaged the city a couple of years ago. I also thought about how the effects of climate change have so far weighed heaviest on the world's most impoverished people - people like Tony. Sitting down on a park bench just after 1 a.m. to rest for a moment I thought back to another thought-provoking conversation I had engaged in at the People's Climate March a day earlier. The words of wisdom that had wove their way into my consciousness were spoken by a young activist from the Sliammon First Nation near Powell River in British Columbia named Ta'Kaiya Blaney.

She said, "You have been given a voice and this mechanism of communication in singing and speaking for a reason. It's to speak for those who have no voice, and to speak for those whose voice goes unheard. Everyone has a gift, everyone has a passion so we have to use that gift and use that passion in good ways and share it. We all have a responsibility because we all drink water; because we all breathe the air; because we all walk upon this foundation of Mother Earth, this foundation of life. Let's work together!"

Looking back upon these encounters a few days later I can see clearly how it is only through sharing and understanding that we can move forward.