

An Interview with William Logan *Author of the Book That Tells All About Dirt*

Whether you're a weekend gardener or you simply care about the environment the film, *Dirt! The Movie* is a must see. That film was based on the book "Dirt: The Ecstatic Skin of the Earth" by William Bryant Logan. I spoke with Logan while he was in Ojai for his high school reunion.

Logan, now a New Yorker, spent four years here at Thacher School before becoming an award-winning translator of Spanish poetry, a writer-in-residence at Manhattan's Cathedral of St. John the Divine, as well as a well-known author.

At first glance, Logan looked like he would be more at home working the fields than living in a Brooklyn apartment. I soon learned that he is also a certified arborist, trimming New York's trees to supplement his income.

A former New York Times columnist, Logan has just finished "Oak: The Frame of Civilization," which *Publisher's Weekly* has called a "sprawling biography of a tree," and is researching his next book, *Air*.

"I found the most wonderful quote for *Air*," Logan told me. "The clouds pass, the rain does its work, and all beings come into their forms."

Of the three topics of Logan's books—dirt, oak, and air—the author said, "My wife, who is a landscape painter, pointed out that these are the three planes of landscape painting: the earth, the trees, and the sky. They all work together."

I asked him what started it all.

"Dirt was one of the things that just came out," said Logan. "It had to be written. I was living in New York, and people didn't believe in it dirt. Nobody believed in it. They were doing the stupidest things, not out of ill will, but out of complete ignorance. What everybody knew a hundred years ago, we had forgotten."

Logan wanted to write the book to put his readers back into a child's world, filled with the wonders of dirt, and thus give dirt its due. "That's why I used the word 'dirt' in the title instead of soil. I wanted to say, 'Start again! Start again and we can have a relationship with this thing which is our mother.'"

Logan's book looks at human history and the human relationship to the land. For example, it looks at Presidents Adams and Jefferson and their very different approaches to the soil, viewing Adams as the more traditional and Jefferson the more experimental. "Both were great agrarians," he said, adding that, by using both approaches, "we can really change something."

And change is what William Logan and the film are after. The writer doesn't want people to go back to all the old methods, but wants them "to reach way back and take whatever we need to go forward."

We talked about the open space movement, community-supported agriculture, and the approaches that organizations like the Ojai Valley Green Coalition are taking.

"It was striking to see this town look so much more like it did forty years ago than I expected," said Logan. He remarked on the local greenbelts, saying, "You're blessed to be on the edge of the National Forest."

Logan also spoke about his experiences back east. "In New York, there are a lot of community gardens. There is actually a great Italian pizzeria, Roberta's in Bushwick, I think, that is now growing all the herbs for their pizza on their rooftop. I think this year they'll also be growing all their own tomatoes."

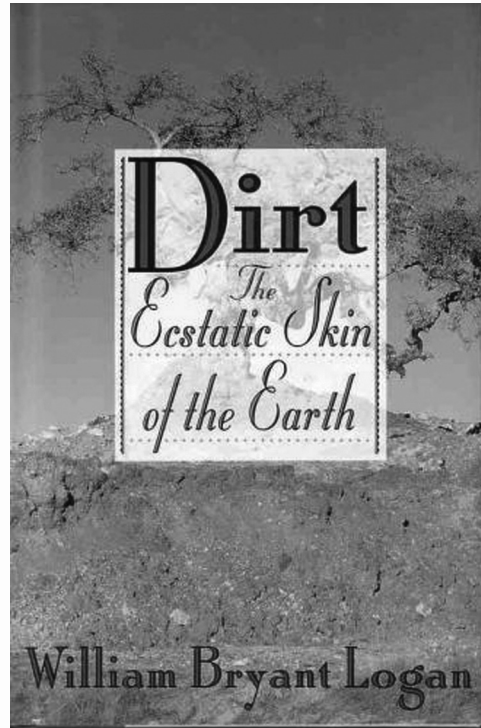
He brought up his sister-in-law's restaurant in Brunswick, Maine, where they use entirely local food. "The hope is that this kind of model can spread," Logan said. "It won't solve the world's food problem, but it's certainly a step in the right direction."

Logan believes that the main thing that needs reawakening in our time is not grand ideas but "the sense of neighbors." Paraphrasing one of his favorite French philosophers,

Gabriel Marcel, he added, "All changes come about because a few people of good will get together for a common purpose. I believe we can't resolve all the problems of the world but we can resolve to solve the problems directly in front of us."

And that can't fail to inspire others.

For more information about Logan, his book and the movie go to www.dirtthemovie.org



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An Interview with Andy Lipkis *Environmentalist, Founder of L.A.'s TreePeople*

When I attended the recent screening of *Dirt! The Movie*, part of the Ojai Valley Green Coalition's ongoing environmental film screenings, I received a double treat. I was not only inspired by the highly informative and enjoyable film, but by the up-close and personal discussion of environmentalism that followed by Andy Lipkis, the founder of L.A.'s TreePeople.

Lipkis, featured in the film, has been an environmental leader for over 40 years. He founded the ground-breaking nonprofit urban reforestation program at age 15, an age when most young people are too overwhelmed with balancing their school and social lives to focus much past their noses.

Lipkis demeanor is inspirational yet approachable, making his remarkable path seem the most natural thing in the world.

"This film was five years in the making," said Lipkis, who underscored the timeliness and importance of the film's message. "Five years ago who could have imagined the scene that we now see happening in the Gulf?"

According to Lipkis, environmentalists are used to being called "crazy nuts" for predicting possible devastation that has now all too tragically unfolded after the explosion of a deep-water drilling rig off the coast of Louisiana.

Lipkis called the film "a cookbook for a radical and rapid healing of the earth" that has now become an even more pressing emergency. Lipkis says many in the field already saw the world heading towards a mass catastrophe and believe that civilization is headed off an unavoidable cliff. Those people believe that all they can do is wait and pick up the pieces and start again after that happens.

"Our vision, our hope, our highest intent and life's commitment is that we build a transition road," said Lipkis, "a safe freeway off ramp that can attract as many people as possible to make the shift."

Lipkis told the audience they will probably be some of the "first responders," the ones who are needed to help our world down the road to recovery.

According to Lipkis, he saw the importance on the ground of local volunteers during Hurricane Katrina, as people worked together to accomplish what no one could alone.

"We need to take it to the next level," said Lipkis. "We need an army of change."

According to Lipkis, he is committed to "retrofitting the entire L.A. area, re-greening the environment." He and others are focusing on a three part plan. The first step is seeing the city as a contained sustainable ecosystem by managing it with cooperation at all levels and throughout all areas of government, business and volunteer organizations. The second is to attract people to become part of the movement of change by finding and promoting "attractive role models" for action, rather relying on the model of self-sacrifice and restriction. Third, bringing in more money and developing an easily navigated free system to give people the tools to make a difference on the web.

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Andy Lipkis, who at the age of 15 founded TreePeople, the premier volunteer tree planting organization in L.A.

Lipkis and *Dirt! The Movie* offered heartening examples where people around the world have already begun this process by removing asphalt and using bio-mimicry techniques, eliminating harmful agricultural methods, increasing tree coverage and using natural water retention systems like bio-swales, and reducing the heat effects that add to global warming. Humans are beginning to use nature's own techniques to heal the earth.

"I have a profound sense of hope," said Lipkis, who first came to Ojai back in 1993, after the Rodney King riots, to reflect on his life's path. "I've come to believe that maybe man has evolved to be the earth's healer, the human as healer. As you saw, things like those microbial fuel cells in the film are more important than they were five years ago or even five months ago. We now have the potential to light the world with alternative fuel sources."

If Lipkis can believe that, after being an environmentalist for over 40 years, can't we all?

For more information about the movie and these organizations go to www.dirtthemovie.org, TreePeople.org, or ojaivalleygreencoalition.org

Linda Harmon is a freelance writer, artist, and community activist living in Ojai, California. Feeling lucky to have found a home there, she is an Ojai City Arts Commissioner, a board member of the Ojai Center for the Arts and Ojai Trees. Contact her at lhart412@roadrunner.com or visit her website at www.highergroundart.com