

# Opening Address

Connectivity 2006

## Julia Butterfly Hill

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Hello!

It's so good to see you! Really!

Did you all look at each other? Take a moment and look around and see how absolutely fabulous you are! Yes... you are fabulous!

And I apologise to those who speak Portuguese that I cannot speak Portuguese but my heart speaks to you today. And I thank the translators for making it possible for us to be together.

I want to begin by acknowledging the original peoples of this place, the indigenous peoples of this place, as the true and rightful people of this area, and I recognise that I am a visitor here, and I come humbly, and my words today are offered as a humble offering that we heal the wounds that have been created people to people and people to the earth.

And I also acknowledge our ancestors, all of the roads and paths of our ancestors that have led us here to this moment together today.

I also acknowledge and thank all of the incredible hard work that I know has gone into making it possible for all of us to be here together today and I acknowledge this building that we are in and for us to remember that this is all sacred earth that built this building and it's the sacred people who built this building.

And the seats and the microphone and the lights; it's all earth and people coming together that has created the space for us to be here today.

And finally I thank you because I know that many of you came long distances, you had to come by plane or by car, whatever it took for you to be here today – I know that it's your commitment to making a difference in the world that brought you here today and that inspires me so much... so thank you, thank you, thank you!

My sharing with you today will be about my personal story; but I want you to know that it's – that I am not saying it as it it's from me, that it's about me. Rather, I only know how to talk about my personal stories.

But I don't get up on stage so that everyone will go, "Ooh! look at Julia butterfly!" because that doesn't actually make a difference in the world.

I get up on stage even though I am nervous (people don't oftentimes know because I have by now done thousands and thousands of presentations, but every time I get on stage my hearts like this: bu-bu-bu-bu-boom...) like, you all scare me... I know that you're nice, but you scare me. But I am willing to get over my nerves and come up here because my commitment, my goal is to be a mirror. My hope and my prayer is that any words that come from my mouth somehow create a mirror that you can see yourself - that you can see how absolutely amazing and powerful and beautiful and truthful and creative and connected that you already are.

I want you to know that I know that anyone of you, every single one of us, could come up on the stage and have something very, very important and very powerful to share with the rest of us and so I'm honoured and I'm humbled to have been the one that was asked to come up here. But I want you to know that my commitment is only to be a mirror.

And my hope is that what I say today allows you to leave here even more powerful, even more alive, even more inspired to make a difference in the world!

And if anything I say doesn't serve you, it's ok. Let it go. In English I would say: just compost it. Anything I say that doesn't work for you, just compost it, put it back in the ground so that way it can serve something else; it'll feed life somewhere else, so that's my hope and my goal with our time here this morning.

I'm looking at my notes just to make sure that I say what I'm supposed to say.

OK, so I am known for having spent 738 days living at 180 feet up in the top of an over one thousand year old redwood tree. I lived there without touching the ground for over 2 years. And I did that partly because I am a little crazy... but partly because I think that what we are doing to our world is even crazier than I am. And that I saw what was happening to the redwoods.

Today's theme is about the world- and my call...and I had many things, as was mentioned this morning, I had many things that called my awareness a little bit by little bit. But then the call got so loud that I knew that I could never turn away. It was when I found out that there were 97% of these trees that are 2 to 3 thousand years old that already had been cut down and that they are still cutting them down.

It was in that moment that I heard this call that I needed to do something!

The reason that I heard the call at that moment is because growing up I had a very challenging, very difficult childhood.

I experienced a lot of violence against myself. I was hurt physically over and over and over again as a little girl and there was no place that was safe for me growing up. And I actually tried to take my own life when I was 7 years old because my childhood had been so painful for me.

It was shortly after that that the butterfly came.

Part of my name is butterfly. And my name comes from a few days after I tried to kill myself when I was 7.

I was hiking in the woods and a butterfly came and landed on me and stayed on me for hours while I was hiking. And at that time I didn't know what I know about butterflies now but in that moment this butterfly landed on me I had this sense of hope - and I think that's oftentimes what butterflies bring to us. Like, you can be having a bad day and a butterfly will all of a sudden show up, and just for that moment its like: ooh! Look at that! "Ooh!" and then you go back and you might be having your bad day again but for just that moment there is this opportunity of beauty - something that's just like: "wow!"

And that's what happened to me when this butterfly brought me this sense of hope.

And all my growing up years when I tried to get away from the violence, even if there was only a tree on the sidewalk, I would go to the tree as my way of trying to be safe.

And I was also raised very poor so I was made fun of a lot in America.

America is very image-conscious. It's all about what kind of clothes you wear, what kind of car you drive, what perfume you wear, which jewellery you have...

So growing up poor, I was made fun of. I was the ugly girl who could not afford clothes, I had to wear the clothes that other people gave me and eat the food that other people gave me. So growing up in that world I thought what was most important was making money - that making money would allow me to buy nice things and it would also allow me the opportunity to get away from places I didn't like. So when I came to university I didn't study anything about the environment. I didn't study human rights: I studied business when I came to university.

I opened a business when I was 18 years old and then I sold that business, and then I did a consulting business and was very successful in the eyes of the world. I went from having nothing to making something of myself and in the eyes of the world. I was successful. Yet something in my heart always felt that somehow there had to be something more, you know...

Have noticed that even people who have billions of dollars; for some reason they still have to keep making more? I don't know if any of you have noticed that? But there is something about how much money you make - it's never quite enough. You're

always searching for something more. And I never made billions but I made a lot and it was never quite enough for me.

But I didn't know what it was. I just know that I was searching for something that would make my life have purpose to it.

So then in August of 1996 I had an experience similar to Flavio's.

I had a car wreck. I was driving a friend's car for her because she had been drinking and we came to a stop and we were hit really hard from behind by a driver who *had* been drinking.

She had a little car with only two doors and he had a really big truck. He hit us so hard that the music, the stereo, broke out of the console, broke out of the front of the car and bent around the stick shift. And the steering wheel went right into my skull!

And it took me almost a year to recover my short-term memory and some of my skills, my ability to hold things and walk and things like that.

And that steering wheel steered me into a new direction in my life because, when I was going through the process of healing, I went, "I either have to choose to live and make a difference or I am going to choose not to live anymore, but I am tired of just getting by! I'm tired of just being able to have money. I want something more.

And I didn't know what that was but I knew that I'm going to find it.

I went on a road trip with some friends. We were driving across the country and in California I said: this is where I'm supposed to be, and I got out of the car. I told my friends goodbye and I gave them some money for food and gas and I said: have a nice trip!

It was there that I entered the redwoods for the first time.

Growing up, my father was a travelling minister, a pastor, a preacher and we would go from church to church to church. And I always felt that even in the churches people were looking for something more.

And when I went into the redwoods for the first time I felt like I had really walked into God's church.

That it wasn't something that we could build, that if you believe in God... or even if you don't - but if you believe in something out there or up there - that the sacred, the beautiful, that something more, is everywhere around us in our forests, in our oceans and the deserts and the mountains.

And when I entered the redwoods I was just like..."WOW...!"

These trees are 2 to 3 hundred feet tall! That's like 18 or so of these rooms stacked up on top of each other.

And I had never seen anything that big! The base of the tree... It took 12 of us with our arms outstretched to go around the base of one tree. And I'm in these woods and I'm like: "Wooh! Wow...!"

And I was really touched by it.

And when I found that 97% had been destroyed and they were *still* cutting them down...!

They cut them down on steep hills where, when they take all the trees, the hills turn into mud and slide away in the wintertime. The redwoods are part of the temperate rainforests in California, so it rains there a lot in the wintertime and, as the rains come, the hills slide away and it destroys ecosystems, it destroys people's homes.

And when I heard that that was happening I thought: "I have to do something! The trees helped me when I was young. It's now my turn to help them"

But then, because I'm a human being, I thought, "Well... I don't know anything - I don't know how to help...Uhhh... I don't know what to do..."

I didn't even know what activism was! You know, I majored in *business* in college...! And I was saying: But I really want to help... and I was torn, you know!

And then I thought that, well, there's probably a lot of people working on this issue. I don't need to worry about it...

But the little voice in my head said: if you have the opportunity to be of service, if you have the opportunity to contribute, and you walk away, it's the same thing as being a part of the injustice in the world.

If there is an injustice happening and we have the opportunity to speak or to act and we choose to silence ourselves and walk away, it's the same thing as supporting that injustice!

And that voice in my head said: You have to do something!

And I said, "OK!"

But when I heard about tree sitting I got very excited. I grew up with 2 brothers and no sisters and we were poor, so we didn't have toys. If there was a tree around, we were climbing it.

So then I heard that you can sit in a tree to help make a difference and I volunteered. I said, "Ooh, I can *do* that! I don't know how to be an activist, but I can sit in a tree! I know how to *do* that do that!"

And the people that were organising it at the time, they didn't know me, and they were like: "Do you have any experience?..."

And I was like: "Well...I climbed trees as a kid...? Does that count?"

And they were like. "No...!"

And they went looking for other people to volunteer. They were walking around this campsite going: "Does anyone want to volunteer?"

I had learned about this incredible tree at the top of the hill called Luna. The activists named the tree Luna after the moon because they used the light of the full moon to bring up the platform and the supplies and the ropes into the tree.

So I had heard about this tree, Luna, and they were looking for somebody to sit in Luna... And I was volunteering but they kept saying no...!

And they were walking around the camp saying: "Do you want to sit in Luna?"

Do you want to sit in Luna...? Do you want to sit in Luna...?

I'm walking behind them going: Pick me! Pick me! I'll do it. Please pick me!!"... and like: Nooo! Shhhh...!

And they went on... "Do you want to do it? Do you want to do it? And like... No...!

So finally they had to pick me because no one else would volunteer! And that's how I landed up in the tree. I thought I would be there 3 weeks to a month and then it turned into two years and eight days, and the reason it did that ...

...

The reason it became that for me was because when I climbed up in that tree I could see for miles and miles and I saw everything I that loved and believed in - and then all of that also destroyed. Because I could see the beautiful forests, I could see the ocean, I could see life so rich and vibrant; and I could see miles and miles of areas where they had completely destroyed all the forest and put it on fire and burnt it to the ground after they had finished cutting all the trees down.

I could see the mill, the lumber mill, right next to me that took these forests that are thousands and thousands of years old and makes them disappear in a week or two.

And when I got up there, I knew that what that really is about and what's happening in our world - and that is part of why I agreed to come to this conference - that if we look at the forest issues, that if we look at the right of all people to have healthy good food and clean water and clean air; if we look at issues like war and poverty, if we

look at issues like – any issue we care about that those issues are really just symptoms of a disease. And that disease is the way we are disconnected from the earth and the way we are disconnected from each other. When I could see for miles, I knew in that moment that the clear cuts are only happening because they are inside of us first. And if you don't think that's so, think about the time when someone has really screamed and yelled at you... Don't you feel that you are almost being cut down inside?

Think about the times when you were made to feel really bad... So that when we look out into the world any time we are disconnected from the earth or each other, that is where a problem is.

Connectivity is about is about connecting. It's about healing what is wrong in our world. It's about healing from the inside out.

So my reason for coming to this conference is to say that every one of us has the power to make the difference in the world, and it's not just about those of us who do crazy things like live in a tree for 2 years, but it's about every time we say something, every time we do something, every time we think something, we are changing the world.

And people come to me oftentimes and say, "Thank you, Julia, for showing us that one person *can* make the difference," with the emphasis on '*can*.'

And I would say, "No, every one of us *does* make the difference."

It's not possible to not make a difference! If you choose to do nothing, it still has an impact in the world, right?

So everything we do and say makes a difference, So we are all completely powerful and I think so often we don't even realise that but I know that all of you are here because you do realise that - that you know how much power you have in making the difference.

We are so often told, or in our minds say that: well, maybe I don't have enough money, or maybe I'm not smart enough, or maybe I'm too young or too old...

And what I know is that every one of us has the ability to make any kind of difference that we choose to put our bodies into, to put our minds into and our hearts into. That there is nothing that is more powerful than the force of our hearts and our spirit and our minds connected together and stepping forward to make a difference!

I have been so blessed to meet people all over the world who are making a difference.

I met a 5-year-old in Alaska who helped stop a logging road!

She's 5 years old...

I mean, she had the help of her community but this is a logging truck and a bulldozer coming up a logging road to come destroy the forest of her community. And, you know, if a little 5-year-old walks in front of a truck...!

She walks out in front of the truck and puts her hands on her hips like only a little girl can, stands there and her hand goes out like this...

And the communities around her, right, and the community's like, "ooh Lord! – here's your mother

But they knew that this young girl at 5 years old, she had the call of the world!

And she was like, "Not even a logging truck is going to stop *me*!"

And so of course the logging truck had to stop and the guy driving the truck came out, and he tried to talk to her and tell her how important it is to cut down all the forests... and she's like..."mmmm... No!"

And finally, the guy had to give up and go home, and it helped to launch the initiative that stopped that logging road from ploughing right into the heart of their indigenous culture's forests, that they had always lived in. And she helped stop it!

I know a 14-year-old in the middle of the United States she's more shy than I am. Like, the first time I made her speak in public cause I gave her an award. (I'm blessed to be part of an organisation that gives awards to young people and she was given an award) So she had to come up on stage and talk, and she was like... she was like *this* the whole time, behind the little platform!

And her little voice was shaking and the microphone was shaking.

And this young woman almost single-handedly stopped a gas line from cutting across her family's farm. She went out, she went to the council meetings, to the city government meetings. And even though she was that scared to talk to all of us, and she was *that* scared to talk to them, she cared more about making a difference. She got up there and she started speaking out and organising, and then she found out that she needed to find an endangered plant to stop... you know, that there would be laws to protect the farm if she could find something endangered.

So she went to the university and started asking for help in how to find endangered plants and animals. She went out to her land and started finding plants and animals and, sure enough, she happened to find one that was endangered, one that they didn't even believe was in the area anymore, and she stopped the pipeline from coming through.

And there are stories like that, I know, in each and every one of you; that every one of us has these kinds of stories where we wake up and we go, Yeah!!!! This is what I want to do with my life! I want to contribute! I want to make a difference!

And no matter how difficult it gets, one thing I'm clear about is that it's the most wonderful thing to do with our lives.

There was a point when I was in the tree; the worst storms ever in the history of the United States were hitting me when I was in the tree - 90 mile and hour winds!

I'm a hundred-and-eighty feet up, on a platform that's 4 by 6 feet - that's this big. That's my home. 180 feet up!

I had plastic tarps for roof and walls; they're gone at this point. The trees like hhhhaaaarrrr hrhraaaaahrrr! I'm getting blown all over the place.

I'm getting slammed by sleet and hail and rain, I'm just a puddle-up mess up on the platform.

"I don't wanna die! I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die..."

And I was so frightened! And all I could think about for a while was myself, which is pretty pathetic, but that's all I was thinking about. And I was praying, and asking that I would survive, and after hours of being like whwhroaoaoorroaoorr, I'm getting a little bored from praying for myself. So then I started praying for people that I liked...

The winds are like, whaaahoaoaoaoahhhh - literally sounding like wild animals and, like, what's left of my tarp is like, "fuh-fuh-fuh-fuh-wwhaahaoaoarrrrrrrrrr!

And after hours of praying for my friends, I'd run out of people that I liked to pray for. And it's still howling and wailing!!

And I heard this little quiet voice in the midst of all the noise: "Now you have to pray for the people you don't want to pray for..."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah... not listeniiiiing..." Whrraouaouahhhrrrrrr ...!

"Now you have to pray for people you don't want to pray for..."

And I knew in a moment, what it was reminding me about was about real connectivity. We like to think about connectivity when it's somebody we like. We like to think about connectivity when it's a place that we like. But it's a whole other thing to think about connectivity with the people and the things going on that we don't like.

But in the time that the storm was whamming on me, I realised that feeling connected to the people and things I don't like is actually a way that I could find power in a way that I didn't think was possible.

If you had asked me when I was standing at the base of that tree, "Hey, you know you're gonna live up there for the next couple of years," I would have been like, "No I'm not! Maybe you are, but I'm not going to."

But I found power up there confronting lessons like this; that choosing to be connected for me gave me power that I didn't know was possible?

Taking it day by day, so often we get overwhelmed at what's happening in our lives and the world. We're like: I don't know how I can make a difference? It seems so big?!

I remember when I was standing at the base of the mountain, looking up at the tree at the top of that hill and I was like: wow did I really volunteer for this?

That's really high up that mountain (and I have about a hundred pounds on my back and I've only walked like 30 feet and I'm, "Ooohhh my shoulders!!) And I was told in my mind: one step at a time, Julia. That's how you climb a mountain.

And it was day by day. That's how I lived in the tree for two years and 8 days.

I didn't, like, sit down and get my charts out and go: ok what is the probability if I live here for the next couple of years we might actually make a difference? It was just day by day, and I was able to come down after two years because we did what we were told for 2 years was not possible. We got the logging company to agree to protect the tree that I was in and the grove of trees around it!

And for over 2 years I was told, you know, "You've made your point but you're never going to make the difference. Come down!"

And for 2 years I'd had to keep trusting that there's a power that when we choose to get connected to everything - not just the things we like - but when we choose to really get connected, there's a power that's available to us that's much bigger than ourselves.

The forces that we're dealing with in the world are, like, *power-over* models, right? They have money, they have weapons, they have big machinery - they've got all kinds of things...

But if you notice, like, the government which I come from, (for which, by the way, I apologise deeply.)

I'm really sorry, I'm working to change it, I swear...

The United States, one of the most wealthy and supposedly powerful countries in the world - and yet they don't seem to have enough weapons. My country's in a vast amount of debt so we can keep making more weapons, like, no matter how much power-over you have it, never seems to be enough.

But *power-with* is the kind of power that makes history!

The kind of power that led Ghandi to lead a salt march and eventually, you know, have people reclaim their country.

Its the kind of power in the United States that had people take a huge stand by sitting down an refusing to move from the front to the back of the bus, and refusing to move from their seats for white people.

It's the kind of power that brings people out into the streets in countries like Brazil to say, "Hey! We want justice, and we're not going to be quiet and were not going to go away till we see it! And we can face military, and we can face all kinds of things, and we can move forward and not give up because it's a power that comes from within.

It's a power that comes from connection and it's a power that lights us up because we know that we are actually here to make a difference.

That's what makes life worth living for!

It's nice to go out and have fun, and to go out with our friends and do all those kinds of things, but to have a life that's about making a difference for others... Don't you think that that's a great reason to be here?

Hm... somebody said something; I bet it was really interesting?

I really get excited being in rooms like this because I have been in the midst of and worked with people, and I know that anything we put our minds to in this room, we can make it happen!

I've been a part of the smallest groups making the biggest change. And the biggest reason they do it is because they refuse to be told otherwise.

You know it's like that 5-year-old being told by the guy coming down the road in the logging truck. He was being really rational with her, and telling her how important it is to cut down her forest, and she's like, "No, doesn't really work for me!"

And there is something about us believing in magic, believing in the impossible and then making it happen, believing that we are bigger than what others think we are, and believing and knowing that we are bigger than sometimes we know ourselves to be - and allowing that to call us forward.

And ultimately, for me, activism is not so much about what we do as about whom we show up as.

It's not just about proving how right we are and how wrong somebody else is. It's about, how do we show up? How do we *get* that how we treat the earth is how we treat ourselves; that how we treat someone else is how we're treating ourselves? How can we realise, how can we make the activist movement all over the world a movement of people who show up as connectivity every moment of every day?

Before we throw something away we think, "Connection! What's the result, what's the impact?"

Before we say something to someone, we think, "Connection! What would it have us do?"

Before we take any action we think, "Connection. What would it have us do?"

Can you imagine if our entire movement of change thought about ourselves; of whom do we need to *be* to make a difference in the world?

How do we make connection? Show up every moment, through us.

And that for me is what activism is about.

And finally activism is about having fun.

I don't know about you, but I get really... America right now, with the anti-war movement... I'm pro-peace; I think that's way more powerful than just anti-war.

Sometimes the rallies are like, "wrrahh wrhahh wrahh... hhhchchgggg" - all this, like, really angry stuff. And I... one of the things I love about Brazil is the music and the dancing, you know? Just like... if we want to go out and change the world, we better have a darn good time doing it, right!

Especially because if we're not having fun, how do we think people are going to want to participate, right?

Who gets inspired by someone going, "And another thing that's wrong? And do you know how bad you are...?"

If all people are, like, singing and dancing and making puppets and building stuff and creating community centres that care of the children and, you know, reclaiming the forests and restoring them and all these great things that are happening all around here, like... That's the movement I want to play in. That's the movement I want to participate in, and that's part of why I'm so excited that this conference is happening here in Brazil, that's so much full of life and creativity and joy.

And finally I'm going to ask you all to stand up again, 'cause we need to remain connected in our body too. If you can't stand up then whatever you can do. Allow your spirit to rise up. And for all those that have gaps in between you I'd like you to get closer together.

And for those of you who are English speaking, we're going to do a call and response here so that we can feel in our bodies how powerful we are.

So I'm going to say something out: and for those of you who are English-speaking, if you can wait for a moment for those who are listening to the translation to have it translated - and we all respond back.

Respond back in your own language, whether it's German, or Portuguese or English, whatever you have. Does that make sense? We'll figure this out.

Ok, so now I want everyone, if you don't mind, to wrap each other's hands so that we can be connected to each other, including across the ways, scooting closer if you need to.

If you have a way to grab the hands of the people behind you, be as connected as we know how to be.

And in this moment, while everyone's getting connected, I want to invite you to bring into your minds the people and the places that you care about, that maybe are no longer here, that maybe the place has been destroyed, or a person who's passed on, or an animal. Also bring in the people that you love and the places that you love who are still here. Whatever you can call into this space with us – imagine the entire planet that we're on right now.

I was hearing yesterday that this is the bottom of the world and I was, like, "Who said so? Because sometimes, like, what's really the bottom and what's really the top, right? Sometimes I feel when I think about the earth, I'm like, "I wonder if this moment I'm standing sideways off the planet? I don't know?"

Like, when I think about that, it's amazing!

So think about the planet we're on. And think about what it is like to stand sideways 'cause that's where creativity happens, 'cause we think we're all walking upright, but maybe we're all just walking like *this*! Really! We just don't know everybody...

Now raise your arms in the air, if you are so able, and I like to remind us to think of the trees. Feel the earth; your feet planted in the earth, like, actually feel them there if you are able, and feel your arms like branches reaching up to the sky.

And remember that activism is actually about us being the trunk. As activists, we are here to be grounded on the planet and to reach into the heavens and believe that we can actually touch the stars. And after me...

We are justice

We are power

We are truth

We are love

We are creativity

We are unstoppable

We are joy

We are inspiration

And we are the ones to make the difference

Yes you are and thank you thank you thank you!