

# Letter from Pumpkin Hollow

## The long road home

Sunfrog (Andy “Sunfrog” Smith)

1997

Pumpkin Hollow, Tenn.—I’m trying to pick this narrative up off the gravel road, gyrating back into the woods. This odyssey of drift must stop somewhere; that somewhere is here. Perhaps my nomadic motion can continue in psychic space as my body plants itself firmly on the ground, my ground, our ground. I previously chose to be homeless, a vagabond, a hobo, roaming, raving and misbehaving.

Now, I ask for land, a place to be into the next millennium, until the next generation, perhaps until I die. I pray to Pumpkin Hollow, “Give me back my voice,” as I hold my daughter tight, watching the sun set behind the glistening horizon from my own private ridgetop meadow. watch the cows and Ruby informs me which ones are happy and smiling, and which ones are sad.

All the cows look rather pathetic to me with their plastic, numbered tags piercing their ears. Soon the cattle will be gone as the former owner takes them to pasture elsewhere. The large fecal cow-pies will join the soil and this land will be ours to live on. Our souls will join the land in an experimental dance towards survival.

Some days I’m not exactly certain how or why I ended up here in the rolling hills and hollers of middle Tennessee, but I have arrived, ready to plant pink toes in the earth like fibrous roots to the divine. I knew I wanted to be in Tennessee one cold dark night last March when we drove north from Florida into the blistering winds of a winter which would not leave, singing along with the tape deck as we crossed the state line, “Tennessee, Tennessee, there ain’t no place I’d rather be. Baby won’t you carry me, back to Tennessee.”

Upon arriving at our new home at Short Mountain Sanctuary, I took a crash course in chopping wood and starting a fire from paper and twigs in the hearth of the wood stove. We lived in a small room in the building known as the Bee Complex. Ruby renamed it the Honey House because the rain barrels reminded her of Winnie the Pooh. During the bacchanalian revelry of the Beltane gathering, it was a den of iniquity christened the House of Salacious.

We were on a mission. We were going to buy land, “paradise for the price of collard greens,” as our friend Julian so eloquently phrased it. We were going to found a community for a new tribe of parents and children. We did not know how hard it was going to be. We did not anticipate all the self-doubt and questioning of our motives. Yet in the end, we did not know how easy it was going to be.

All our anarchist pagan, punk, hippie, friends everywhere who talk about getting land, all prattle about the place they feel called to be. Popular epicenters include the Pacific northwest and the mountains around Asheville, North Carolina. We too must admit to answering some ineffable voice within. We were drawn to the magical enclaves of queer community at Ida and Short Mountain and to Lisa’s parents, sister, brother-in-law and nephew in Nashville.

A recurring fear raised by urban radicals yet to make the leap to living on the land concerns “dropping out” and losing our connections to “revolutionary movements and activism.” Whether these ideas are raised as warning or critique, they echo similar verbal attacks waged by the militants of the late sixties and early seventies towards their softer peers spiraling into mysticism as they moved to places like the Farm in Summertown, Tennessee.

Others tried to engineer utopia with egalitarian social theory at places like Twin Oaks in Virginia. Both those communities—and hundreds of other less well-known ones—still thrive today as a compelling witness to the creation of a genuine alternative society. The secret societies and post-hillbilly havens of rural retreat, where wannabe Thoreaus read the *Mother Earth News* and the Real Goods catalog while sitting on the composting trapper, do not necessarily undermine the revolutionary project of urban activists simply because we need both strategies of fight and flight if we are going to survive. We need warriors and foragers, barricades and barn-raising.

In reality, I am not that different or detached from my citified comrades. Even after several months of training in the butch arts of farm life, from milking goats to wielding a chainsaw, I feel more compelled to sit at the computer and write treatises like this than to plant a garden or pour the foundation of a new house. Nearly a decade of shouting anthems from the polluted mouth of the Motor City, I was an alien pioneer in the ghetto streets then, just as I may appear foreign to the locals of these hills today.

Like many of my contemporaries, I migrated from suburbia to the inner city, and now from the city to the country. At 29, I'm not as pissed off and angry as I was at 21, but the seething indictment of industrial-capitalist civilization which I cultivated as a staff member of Detroit's *Fifth Estate* newspaper remains central to my motivation. I invoke the principles of liberated desire, mutual aid and voluntary cooperation in starting a collective farm—the same ideals which spawned soup kitchens, mud people parades, performances and demonstrations during my Detroit years.

I recognize some of the basic contradictions contained within my rustic exodus. For many years in the Motor City, of all places, I avoided automobiles, rode my bike incessantly and organized “Kill the Car” protests at General Motors world headquarters. After moving to the country, I depend on cars more than ever for frequent commutes to Nashville where I earn money and visit family. In buying land, we must also strive to supersede the problematic paradigm of private ownership—through collectivization, through communalism, and possibly through the model of the community land trust. And to pull that off, we need a lawyer and a legal status. We may become a corporation.

Many activists today want to update the Catholic Worker model of forming a rural collective farm directly connected to an urban locus of political resistance, which explains why some people desire settling in close proximity to a vibrant city milieu. To the best of my knowledge, few, if any anti-authoritarian collectives have achieved this goal, perhaps because rural land near cities is so damn expensive and suburbanized. We're remote, yet close to a cultural center—Nash Vegas, a fundamentalist vaudeville circus of nauseating southern niceness which wants to loosen up enough to be as hip as Atlanta or Memphis.

Somewhere between March and December, we met roadblocks and land mines. We had frustrating, failed attempts to join other communities. The real estate ads always asked too much money for too little land. We explored the possibilities of auctions and foreclosures and kept our ears to the ground for the word about cheap rental properties. Every time it seemed we had gone as low as we could go, another setback slapped us in the face.

After looking at one particularly beautiful but inaccessible piece of real estate, a hostile neighbor chased us away saying, “We don't want any mother fuckin' faggots running around back here.” In another land deal, the seller went back on his word and his handshake with us and sold to a timber family which will log the land. I reached several points where I was ready to leave Tennessee and settle for anything, I mean anything, just so we could have a home.

We had looked at Pumpkin Hollow six months earlier and Lisa had fallen in love with it. It was too expensive for us, but we combined energies, dreams and money with another family, and it was ours in a matter of days in an almost effortless transaction. We know we are retracing many steps blazed by other disaffected light-skinned pioneers, past and present. We are reading and re-reading the bibles of radical rural retreats.

I am pledging we will not become apolitical. The pressures and responsibilities of land ownership (truly, stewardship of something we can never own) will not dampen the fire of our libertarian spirits. We are already members of an extended family and network of communitarians and back-to-the-land-types in this area. And, this network continues to grow. Our homestead is only one of four large farms purchased by friends and family in this immediate region this year.

It is just a beginning. We are not even on the land yet and I am looking for sweeping conclusions. I'm really just picking up gravel on the path that leads me home. I am dreaming of cold mornings splitting logs and sipping scalding coffee, huddling by the wood stove to keep warm, and hot nights dancing naked by the campfire.

Imagining Ruby coming back to this land when she is a woman with children of her own. Then she'll have her own dreams and I hope to still nurture my voice, to tell more stories to my grandchildren from the ridgetop meadow of Pumpkin Hollow where I want to build my house and live forever.

FE staff member-in-exile, Sunfrog has settled in rural Tennessee after a year of travels in a camper van. Once an active participant in the Detroit radical scene, he continues to produce zines as well as organize festivals and gatherings in his area.

His travel zine, *Hobos & Homesteaders*, and his polysex zine, HBS, are available from him at the Jazz Family address, Sunfrog, Lisa and Ruby, 1467 Pumpkin Hollow Rd., Liberty TN 37095.

# fifth Estate

Sunfrog (Andy "Sunfrog" Smith)  
Letter from Pumpkin Hollow  
The long road home  
1997

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/350-fall-1997/letter-from-pumpkin-hollow>  
Fifth Estate #350, Fall, 1997

**[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org)**