

## **Penny Eastwood, known as Dongria Kondh,**

Penny was a great storyteller and her formative years became the stuff of legend: adopted by a well-to-do family in Dorset, her father worked at Aldermaston nuclear power station and she was sent to boarding school in Glastonbury. 'My origins are shrouded in mystery... I've always wondered whether they were a bit more careless about radiation in those days and that was how I came to be adopted... I had a posh upbringing... a very nice childhood really, you know, no one's going to complain about being around ponies... I was a bit of a rebel at school, I would sneak out at night and go up with the hippies on Glastonbury Tor'.

She went to Warwick University precociously early at 17, where she met Jon Tattersall. After graduation they lived together in Liverpool for a number of years. Penny ran a cafe in the Open Eye Gallery, with Bill Drummond of KLF and Zoo Music fame as her washer-upper. 'I had to kick Julian Cope out, because he'd keep talking to Bill and distracting him from washing up'.

Their first child, Michael, died soon after being born and then after the birth of daughter Kate, Penny experienced a deep despair at the future of the world, as a wave of green political consciousness swept the UK in the 80s. A pivotal conversation with a priest changed her understanding of her place in the world and set her on a path of service to the greater good.

In 1987 Penny decided to research climate change in the Peace Studies department at Bradford University and Jon got a job in Hebden Bridge, so they moved there. By the end of 1991, she had gained a first class degree, embarked on a PhD, was newly a single-mum to 7-year-old Kate and 2-year old Jem, had bought a small terraced house in Broughton Street (round the corner from Jon) after her mother died, and was fully committed to fighting climate change. Her dissertation was published in more readable form as 'Responding to Global Warming: an examination of the prospects for effective action'.

The Rio Earth Summit in 1992 was the big hope. Penny organised a two-week 'Walk for the Earth', from Manchester to London – a large group with banners, walking and camping, stopping off en route to be welcomed and hosted by mayors, quakers, Friends of the Earth groups, et al. It was during this walk that she met Billy, a young psychiatric nurse who'd just quit his job, also committing himself to work in service of the earth. They were smitten. Billy moved into Broughton Street. Penny organised three more Walks for the Earth in each subsequent year, with an increasingly loyal group of WftEs (Woofties), finishing with a walk from Menwith Hill US spy base nr Harrogate to Sellafield nuclear power station in 1995.

Penny & Billy joined the Hebden Quaker meeting, which suited their no-nonsense approach to service and accountability to the social/ecological good rather than to man-made authorities and laws. They got married in 1994 and continued various campaigning and direct action around climate change issues. '(Climate change is) a very big thing and it's very easy for people to ... go in denial. It's a bit depressing, handing out depressing leaflets about depressing things that might happen, ... and at the same time as I was in this sort of head state, there was a Hebden Bridge Woodlands Group forming and... one night, I woke up in the middle of the night with the idea of Treeresponsibility, with the word Treeresponsibility in my head ... combining the climate awareness stuff with the tree stuff... trying to engage people with something positive so that they'd be more likely to listen to the good things I had to impart'.

Treesresponsibility was launched in March 1998 as a 25-year project to re-forest the Calder Valley – a triumph of storytelling and communicating a vision. The large group who set it up, including climate activist friends, became a tight team over the years. Penny was the face of it - persuading landowners to offer sites, persuading councils to collaborate, persuading businesses and funders to give money, persuading schools to send children out to plant trees. And Broughton Street was filled with tools, saplings, tarps, flyers, various agencies' strategic plans and people.

The simple idea was to get people out planting trees: tree-planting weekends for reunions, celebrations and just regular volunteering, with people coming from across the country. Penny loved catering, co-ordinating, demonstrating, teaching, partying and getting her hands into the earth.

Treesresponsibility was founded with accountability as a central value, and rather than choose to incorporate with 'limited liability', it deliberately remained an 'unincorporated association' – a philosophical and practical choice that made the members individually accountable and financially liable for every decision they made. A clear and brave rejection of the capitalist corporation and all it stands for.

The tree-planting also served as a positive counter-balance to their ongoing climate activism. Penny, Billy and friends were regulars at the Climate Camps and Reclaim the Power camps, starting in 2006. In 2007 she super-glued her hands to the front door of lastminute.com's HQ, protesting 'binge flying', as part of 'Plane Stupid'. It seems that the funding bid Treesresponsibility was awaiting wasn't damaged by Penny's face being plastered on the front page of the Hebden Bridge Times. By 2010 she was famous for supergluing: as part of the Climate Camp actions that year, she glued herself to the offices of the Royal Bank of Scotland, to protest the financing of a bauxite mine that would destroy the tribal lands of the Dongria Kondh in India. Before the action, she changed her name to Dongria Kondh, swearing to keep the name until she died or the tribal lands were saved. The tribe themselves fought a years-long battle that was eventually successful. By then everyone knew her as Dongria.

But there were plenty of local campaigns to be fought too. What's the point in planting thousands of trees, if an open-cast coalmine is planned just over the hill? After a hard battle, they were victorious and planning permission was denied.

It became apparent that the soil erosion and peat erosion, combined with the changing climate, was a key factor in the increasingly regular Calder Valley flooding – and once again tree-planting was the answer. The erosion was exacerbated by the practice of burning heather off peat moorland to facilitate grouse-shoots. Treesresponsibility joined networks, ran campaigns and innovated natural flood management techniques, with Dongria doing the talking, persuading and wrangling to get the agencies on board – The Source partnership to manage the water catchment in the Calder Valley, the Anti-Grouse Moor Network, the Ban the Burn campaign, The Forest After The Flood project, leaky dams, the Hebden Bridge Partnership, Yorkshire Peat Partnership, and so on.

Her work in creating collaborations and a strong narrative around climate impact, re-forestation and natural flood management changed the physical and social landscape of the Calder Valley. She was instrumental in planting 5-600,000 trees and the word 'legacy' is mentioned in nearly every message about her.

The thing she found toughest about the cancer diagnosis was the idea of not lasting to the end of the Treesresponsibility project. Needless to say, they were already planning for succession – the pandemic just cut the last session off the course for groups wanting to replicate the model, and another group has been taking on parts of the Calder Valley work in the run up to 2023.

She carried on working and campaigning after the diagnosis. Frustrated by the Natural England's lack of action on heather burning, she carried out a one-woman 'Ban the Burn' camp outside their Leeds office in high winds and rain. Fortunately, they issued a reasonable statement the same day, otherwise she was willing to shiver overnight in a puddle of water in her leaky pop-up tent.

Her activities over her last year were, of course, limited by the pandemic, but she still managed to get to her beloved Spain over the summer and to spend Christmas catering for ten at Cornerstone Housing Co-op – 'because I really want to cook all my favourite foods again and I won't get another chance'.

She was very pleased to hear in February about the creation of the annual Dongria Kondh bursary, funded by Calderdale Council, the Environment Agency, National Trust and Slow The Flow, to support two Masters students investigating natural flood management.

I have known very few people who were 'themselves' as much as Dongria was herself, in every situation. She was brilliantly diplomatic when 'the work' demanded it of her, but she didn't change how she was or what she thought to impress anyone and was always ready to agree to disagree.

She has been described by several people as a force of nature and will be remembered as a demon scrabble player, lover of stories, tea and beer and an undaunted woman who could make the seemingly impossible happen as long as she could cajole enough people to join in. She always said she wasn't interested in being happy, but it was clear from knowing her that she found happiness in serving the earth and its beings.

She is survived by son, Jem, and daughter, Kate, and two granddaughters, her partner Nagakusala (formerly Billy), many, many friends and comrades and more than half a million trees.