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# DIRECT ACTION

MEMOIRS OF AN  
URBAN GUERRILLA



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URBAN GUERRILLA

ANN HANSEN

BETWEEN THE LINES  
TORONTO

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## Direct Action

Members of an Urban Guerrilla

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For those who struggle so our planet can flourish;  
for those whose names may never be known.

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## *Preface*

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During the late 1970s and early 1980s there was in Canada a large anarchist community that was particularly active in the prison abolition, feminist, Native, environmental, and Third World solidarity movements. While still working within these movements, some anarchists began to adopt direct action tactics that went beyond the legal boundaries defined by the state. They took up direct action not because they couldn't control their rage, but as part of a long-term strategy to build a revolutionary movement that would be beyond the control of corporations and the state. An even smaller group within this movement decided to start a guerilla campaign — going underground to avoid possible arrest and imprisonment. I was part of a guerilla group that we called Direct Action.

I have reconstructed my story of Direct Action's militant campaign based on my own recollections and using court documents and newspaper articles. Despite my best attempts to tell this story as though I were holding up a mirror to the time period, I do recognize the limitations of my memory, time, and the available documents. Inevitably my account of the details of events, and my presentation of the thoughts and emotions that I ascribe to people, have been guided by and represent my own interpretations.

I have used the real names of the people involved in Direct Action because their participation in these events is part of the public record. But I have changed the names of many secondary characters not only to protect their identities but also because I have re-created conversations, thoughts, and emotions in order to tell a more complete story. One major character, "Wayne Fraser," is a composite based on a real police intelligence officer involved in the investigation and surveillance of Direct Action. I fictionalized his character in order to create a counterpoint to our group's unfolding campaign. The other policemen's actions and characters are also based on real people, but their names too have been changed. "Rose Gibraltar" is also a composite character created to provide more information about the popular legal struggle against the construction of the Cheekeye Dammain power line. I used the real names of the Litton bombing victims and the various anti cruise missile protesters (chapters 28, 30, 35) because their comments come directly from newspaper articles and are therefore a matter of public record.

Although I have tried to present the details of the main events surrounding the conversations involving Brent Taylor, Doug Stew-

art, Julie Belmas, Gerry Hannah, and myself as accurately as possible, I have re-created the conversations based on memory. Chapters 38 to 40, however, include largely verbatim conversations taken from transcripts of the RCMP wiretaps provided to us during our trial. Since the stack of papers from the wiretaps is about a foot high, I have had to edit the conversations, but in doing so I tried to remain true to the spirit and intent of the originals. I believe they give the reader a window into the group dynamic.

Chapters 29 and 31, which describe police surveillance, are based on surveillance notes given at the time of our trial to the Crown prosecutor, Jim Jardine, by Corporal Andrew Johnston of the RCMP Security Service. These documents were available to us as part of the legal disclosure that the Crown had to make to our defence lawyers.

Thanks go to Maureen Garvie, my writing mentor, who gave me the confidence to write about these events, and also to all the people at *Between the Lines*, who gave me total freedom to express myself on a taboo topic that most publishers would want to carefully mould in order to create the "right" message. And a special thanks to Brent Taylor, Doug Stewart, Gerry Hannah, and Julie Belmas. They were not involved in writing this book, but they risked the consequences of acting upon their convictions.



Doug Stewart, 1983, Oskalia  
All photos courtesy of the author



Gerry Hannah, 1983, Oskalia



Julie Belmas and Ann Hansen, 1983, Oakalla



Brent Taylor, 1983, Oakalla

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*Somewhere  
near  
Squamish*



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January 20, 1983, started out as a normal day in our rather atypical lives. The five of us got up at dawn, loaded our truck, and headed out of Vancouver for our weekly shooting practice in a secluded box canyon near the sleepy coastal town of Squamish, British Columbia. It was the kind of clear and sunny winter day when all living creatures seemed glad to be alive, despite the morning cold. The air was filled with the sound of birds. Down in the strait, pods of black and white killer whales arched through the waves and dark seals lay smiling and basking on snow-covered rocks. The air was so clean and crisp that it was a joy just to breathe it.

We took our usual route along highway 99, which winds like a long black snake up the coast to Squamish and the Mount Whistler ski resorts. The barren, snow-covered cliffs on one side of the highway and the sheer drop into the ocean on the other left little room for driver error. I leaned into the steering wheel and clutched it until my knuckles turned white and the fresh scab on my index finger began to ooze blood. I recalled Brent's dire warning that this little scratch would scar me for life if I didn't take the time to bandage it before we left. The only solace I found was in the comforting sound of our four-wheel drive's huge tires humming soothingly on the slick asphalt turns.

By the time we reached Britannia Beach, about thirty kilometres south of Squamish, I needed a break. We pulled off the highway into a parking lot, stopping at a small gas station and variety store nestled into the cliffs. I stepped out of the pickup, which we affectionately called Bob, and stretched my arms into the air. Gerry and Julie jumped out of the front seat too and immediately started chasing each other around, throwing snowballs and laughing so loud their squeals echoed off the rock faces. Doug and Brent lifted up the glass door of the truck canopy and slid out from the back, where they had been sitting in the freezing cold amongst all the packsacks full of pistols, rifles, shotguns, and ammunition. Doug looked like some handsome soldier of fortune with his dark sunglasses, camoclothes, and military-style haircut. They were still immersed in a debate over the mechanics of converting a Mini-14 from a semi-automatic into a fully automatic rifle.

After buying coffees we piled back into the pickup and continued on our journey to the abandoned logging road and box canyon where we always did our target-practising. As we drove, a punk

tone on the radio sparked our attention: "You call us weirdos, call us crazy / Say we're evil, say we're lazy . . ."

"Hey, that's the Subhumans!" laughed Julie, turning the volume way up. Until he'd decided to embark on this mission with us, Gerry had been the bass player in the now-defunct punk band. Julie sat beside me, singing along in her abandoned way. She was a sunning young woman with strands of jet black hair falling loosely across her white skin. Her bright blue eyes were animated and alive. On the other side of her, Gerry smiled at her earnest singing attempt.

We had been driving again for about forty-five minutes when on the highway ahead I could see a long line of cars backed up to a standstill, its front end out of sight somewhere around a curve. "I wonder what that's all about?"

"Probably a rock slide," Gerry said. "They're always clearing away debris on this highway."

We reached the last car in the line and came to a stop. Every now and then a car passed in the oncoming lane, indicating that up ahead, at least on the other side, someone was letting traffic through. We sat listening to the blare of the radio as our long file of cars crept forward.

Finally we crawled around a curve and could see the head of the line a few cars forward, where a highway flagman was stopping vehicles and talking briefly to the passengers before sending them on their way. Eventually we were second in line, and we stared, half-blinded by the glare of the sunlight reflected off the glass and metal of the car in front of us, as the flagman leaned inside it. Then he waved the driver off and the car disappeared slowly around a bend.

It seemed to take forever before he waved us on too. Slowly we drove forward, the music from our radio echoing off the mountainside. The stretch of winding highway was now eerily empty except for a helicopter that seemed to be hovering above us. For almost half a kilometre we drove without seeing another car from either direction until we came to a blind curve. As we rounded it, we came to an abrupt halt in front of a huge dump truck parked oddly across both lanes of the highway, though with no sign of blasting or road work going on. In front of the dump truck stood a flagman wearing a bright yellow vest with a large red "X" criss-crossed on his chest. I distinctly remember being struck by this flagman's red hair and clean, chiselled jaw line.

"Doesn't that guy remind you of that cartoon character, Dudley Do-Right?" I laughed nervously to Julie and Gerry. "You know that crazy RCMP guy in the cartoon?" To my surprise, they both agreed.

The flagman held up the "STOP" side of his sign and stepped up to our truck window, motioning for me to roll it down. As I leaned over to turn the handle, I caught a glimpse in my side-view mirror of another dump truck pulling up behind us.

"Is somebody going to move that dump truck or do I have to move it for you?" I was saying lightheartedly when I was struck by the expression on his face. His cartoon smile was stretched tautly, and his eyes were filled with terror, as though my feeble joke was a serious threat.

As his eyes locked on mine, my whole world began to move in slow motion and my insides went numb. He reached in through my open window and grabbed my arm with one hand and with his other opened the cab door. He flung me out onto the ground. I lay in the gravel at the side of the road with the flagman poised on top of me, the barrel of his .38 revolver pressed ugly against my temple. He yelled something in a voice filled with fear to another flagman, who I could see was now crouched on top of Julie on the other side of the road. She lay motionless. I wondered if she was dead.

A shot rang out, so loud it shook me to the core of my being. Then another shot. *They have shot Brent and Doug.* Smoke from the guns filled the air and stung my nostrils and eyes. Suddenly highway crewmen were everywhere, jumping from behind large boulders, running towards us from stands of trees, and leaping over snowdrifts beside the road. They were dressed in the uniform beige coveralls of the Department of Highways, with the exception of the assault rifles they carried, pointed in our direction. As the gunsmoke began to clear, I also saw men wearing camouflage combat fatigues, bulletproof vests, and gas masks. There were even dogs.

It was all so surreal. My brain was incapable of absorbing and deciphering the meaning of these events, but I knew that our little trip up the Whistler highway had taken a terrible turn and life as I knew it would never be the same.

From my spot on the ground I could see the highway crewmen and men in combat fatigues massing in groups around the dump trucks. They yelled to one another in strained voices. Several unmarked cars with men in suits inside pulled up from around the bend. They got out and appeared to take command of the

situation. Looking under the truck, I could see Julie lying motionless on the other side. I figured I was the only one left alive.

The man on top of me had haggardified me. Now he got up, slowly and cautiously, treating me as though I was the one with the gun. "Get up," he ordered. His expression was so tense that I moved very carefully: for fear that, despite the handcuffs, one false move on my part might cause him to shoot me. He patted me firmly all over my body to make sure I didn't have any weapons.

The fact that these were policemen had finally entered my consciousness. I was told to begin walking towards the unmarked cars parked a short way down the road. The winter sun sent heat waves curling off the asphalt, melting images of people in its path. I felt sure they would shoot me before I reached the cars, and no one would ever know what had happened on this isolated stretch of highway. The only witnesses left alive would be the cops and highway men with assault rifles. But, strangely, I was not afraid. My entire nervous system seemed to have shut down. It was as though I was in a slow-motion nightmare that would soon end.

I walked and walked, yet the expected shot did not ring out. Why didn't they shoot me? I looked around. They were everywhere. There must have been a couple of dozen riflemen. If they weren't going to shoot me, my fate was clear. If I continued walking, I would get into that car and be whisked off to prison and to probable torture.

I could change my fate by one simple move. *Run.* I pictured myself beginning to run, and the fear in those men's faces guaranteed me that their reaction, through both instinct and instruction, would be to shoot. It occurred to me that they wanted me to run, so they would have an excuse to kill me. What other reason could there be for choosing such a remote area to make the bust?

Time and space had entered another dimension. Seconds had become hours; movement, incredibly slow. Should I begin to move my legs, *run, run, run,* and guarantee death — or should I continue to walk towards the car and begin the slow death that prison would inevitably be? I listened to the rhythmic crunch of my boots in the gravel and the chirping of a solitary sparrow on a branch somewhere nearby. I don't know what tipped the scale in the direction of life. Perhaps it was the sound of that bird; perhaps the fear of death. Whatever the reasons, I kept slowly walking. Later on there would be many times when I looked back on that moment and wished I had chosen to run.

Then I saw Julie, looking dazed and dishevelled, walking towards the cars. My heart soared and I smiled at her. Then another welcome sound: Gerry asking a cop if he could retrieve a tooth that had been knocked out during the arrest. "That's the least of your worries," the cop said. He opened the car door so Gerry could get in.

So Gerry and Julie were still alive. I looked around for Brent and Doug. To my relief, they were already sitting in one of the cars, staring blankly forward, looking as numb as I felt. Their eyes were bloodshot, and they were covered in sludge, as though they had been dragged through the wet snow on the side of the road. Looking back, I could see poor Bob, our pickup, the doors flung open, the windows of the canopy smashed into thousands of glass fragments strewn all over the road. Later on I would learn that the cops had fired tear gas canisters into the back of the truck in order to pacify Brent and Doug. For me these images became forever frozen in time.

I was directed into a car along with Julie. We sat motionless and speechless, each in our own little world trying to come to terms with what had just happened. I stared at the back of the heads of the two cops sitting in the front seat, murmuring to each other. Two other cars, one carrying Brent and Doug and the other Gerry, pulled out in front of us and began the winding journey back down the road. We were driven along the isolated stretch of highway to the point where the roadblock began. As we went slowly by the line of vehicles, each carload of heads turned to stare at us. Our lives as a public spectacle had begun.

Once my brain was no longer consumed by trying to digest the events taking place, my first thought was of my mother. In the years leading up to this moment, I had conveniently blocked out the possibility that someday she would be exposed to everything I had done and that this would cause her great pain. Now I was overwhelmed with the realization that in a few hours my actions would be front-page news. The headline "Littun Bombers Arrested" (and my name mentioned in the first paragraph) would come screaming out at her, shaking her peaceful existence. The news of my arrest and involvement in English Canada's biggest so-called terrorist activities would no doubt hurt her as profoundly as would news of my death. I fervently regretted that I had not chosen to run and be shot dead, because in the long run my death would probably have been easier for her to cope with than the knowledge

that her nature-loving oldest daughter was one of Canada's most notorious "terrorists."

The vision of her sitting in her kitchen staring in horror at the newspaper haunted me. All my good intentions and motives during the past few years would receive no airplay or newspaper; only my actions in their criminal context would be of interest to the mass media. I shook my head and stared out at the waves crashing against the rocks below the highway as our little entourage of police cars wound its way steadily down the road. The three police cars carrying us were escorted behind and in front by unmarked cars. Later I found out that they were filled with SWAT team members in the unlikely event that fellow "terrorists" had plotted a counter-ambush.

But as the reality of our situation sank in, I became aware of a strange feeling of relief that I had never anticipated. It was over. For the past two years we had lived a life normally only depicted in movies and novels, a life that could best be described as a political crime drama. We had lived daily with the threat of death or prison hanging over our heads. We had spent our time either plotting or in the midst of carrying out bombings, robberies, or other related support actions.

The tension of our lives had been relentless. We never took a break, never went to the beach for a day of doing nothing, never took a casual walk in Stanley Park, never slept in or hung about the house lazily reading a book on a rainy day. Our group was on a mission, and we lived each day with the zeal and fervour of people who believed that their every action was so important that the survival of the planet depended on them. If we did go for a walk in Stanley Park, it was to discuss the merits of bombing CF-18s at the Cold Lake Canadian Forces base versus blowing up a bridge in the infrastructure of the Northeast Coal Project. When we went swimming it was for exercise, not leisure. If we stayed home to read a book, it would be a provincial government report on megaprojects in Northern British Columbia. If we slept in, it would be because we had been up until three o'clock the night before practising stealing cars for a future robbery. Urban guerrillas do not take vacations.

Finally it was over. I would not have to get up tomorrow morning and case the Lougheed Mall for the Brink's robbery. Better yet, I did not have to worry about doing the Brink's robbery five days from now. My fate was no longer in my hands, but in the hands of

others. In some bizarre way, this was a relief. The moral and political responsibility I had created for myself to carry out these actions in what I believed would be a militant political movement was over, at least for the time being.

Now, facing the reality of prison, I found it strangely comforting to know that the threat of prison no longer existed. I could finally relax and let events beyond my control unfold.

I looked over at Julie, wondering how she was coping. She was only twenty-nine years younger than me. We didn't dare speak because we knew the police would be listening to glean information from every innocuous thing we said. She did not look back at me, but stared out the window at the pine forests whizzing past.

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Julie told me later that she was overwhelmed by the irony of her situation. It was all going to come to an end just as it had begun. She still remembered, as vividly as though it was yesterday, seeing a TV news story two years before about a group of peasant women and children massacred by renegade military men in a church in El Salvador. The pictures of the surviving peasant women and children from the village were burned clearly in her memory. With terror in their eyes, their faces etched with expressions of horror, they stood barefoot before the cameras, their wounds both physical and emotional, open for all the world to see. That newscast was the turning point that had motivated her to take her first political step to join an El Salvador support group.

During our arrest, when a cop lifted her right out of her seat in the truck onto the ground and put a gun to the back of her head, the spectre of the women and children in El Salvador was so terrifying that she lost control of her bladder. Perhaps the comparison between her arrest and the massacre in El Salvador was extreme, but that fact did not make her terror less real. Now, in the police car, she turned her gaze from the white surf below the road to the wire mesh that separated us from the backs of the two policemen sitting at the front seat. Despite her constant self-reminders that this was Canada, not a military dictatorship, and that the likelihood of being killed was remote, images of the cops pulling over and shooting us kept plaguing her. Perhaps the wet spot on her



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