

## **Tribes by Fiona Revell**

I don't find much that really grabs my attention on television but a series I find fascinating is "Tribes." The programme features Bruce Parry travelling around the world visiting and immersing himself within the cultures of various tribal groups. Apart from the way of life and sheer resourcefulness of all the tribes he comes upon I am always amazed by the welcome he is given. These people allow a western stranger, for the duration of his stay, a complete member of the community. He, for his part, fully involves himself in their life-style, participating in all aspects of tribal life.

Something else I find incredible, something we would do well to learn from, is their sense of community, trust and respect for each other. To them, this applying to all the tribes he has met, homelessness is an alien concept. The idea of any member of the tribe being cast aside would appall them. They also cannot understand the idea of people not working together, of members of the community not having and fulfilling a role within their society. Even crime is non-existent; there is no need for law enforcement because they do not harm each other. Maybe this is because they live in smaller groups. They are not crammed together in overcrowded cities where nobody knows each other, let alone where they fit. I don't know if this is the reason, but it seems a reasonable assumption.

The sad thing about this programme is that our way of life is threatening theirs at an alarming rate. The very existence of these people and their way of life is under constant attack from others pushing further and further into their land. The last episode I watched showed a perfect example of what we call progress being anything but for the people whose lives it most affects. These people are the Penan. They are a nomadic forest tribe in Malaysia and have lived the same way for generations. Unfortunately there may not be many more able to live this way. They are forest people, everything they need to live comes from the forest. They hunt and fish, make their homes, forage for fruit and berries and find their medicines from here amongst other things. It astonishes me just what they get from the forest, yet they do not destroy it but work with it. They even have a method of long distance communication using pieces of stick positioned in very specific ways, it is totally amazing.

Now though, the loggers present a constant threat to not only the Penan but to the forest itself. As well as the people a whole eco-system is at threat, in fact rapidly disappearing. The logging companies say they use methods that will sustain the forest, this is not strictly true. Whilst they may replant trees in place of those they have cut down they are not replacing the right kind of tree, apart from the fact that the time it takes for trees to grow is a time the land does not have. The Penan showed areas of re-plantation and for miles the only things to be seen were palm trees. These areas are no good for the Penan for the palm trees are no good for wild life and restrict any other kind of growth. These areas may

be financially good but that is about all, they do nothing to keep the delicate balance of the forest in tact. The Penan are genuinely fearful for their future.

I found it hard to watch such a peaceful people with a lifestyle spanning generations being destroyed. How long will they be able to live off the forest? How long will their nomadic lifestyle and tight knit communities remain? In fact, how long will the forests themselves remain? I really think we should question, as do the Penan, whether what is happening to their world is progress. We are the ones with fractured communities, homelessness, crime and violence not them. We are the ones who pollute and destroy almost everything we touch, not them. They are the ones who live a peaceful, loving existence in harmony with all around them, yet they are the ones who get pushed out.

These programmes are not only very interesting they really do make you question the way we live and who is really more “civilized.”

*Fiona Revell will be guest editing the next issue of the Willow Walker magazine on a theme of global homelessness.*

### **Poem for Stuart Shorter**

I write about almost anything, whatever happens to inspire me. Sometime I see or hear something that makes me feel so strongly that I feel a driving compulsion to put it down n paper.

After going to the advance screening of Stuart; A Life Backwards it made me feel a driving need to say something. I could not put it on paper in any manner that made sense for days, so many thoughts whirred though my head. Having given myself time to calm down and digest my thoughts and feelings fully I eventually was able to write.

The poem I have written is aimed mainly at the audience reaction, although had the film been put together in a better way maybe they would not have seen fit to laugh at Stuarts' pain.

I could sit and write pages about the shortcomings of the film and its' negative portrayal of homelessness as well as the ignorance shown by certain members of the audience but instead here is my poem.

**Stuart this is for you. Wherever you may be, rest in peace.**

From start to finish full of strife,  
But that didn't make it less of a life,  
You saw how each day he had to fight,  
Yet somehow you saw it fit to make light,  
Imagine if each day you were in pain,  
Not knowing when you would go insane,  
Never really being well,  
Physical or mental torture you can't tell,  
It may be both, either or,  
Whichever life quality is pretty poor,  
So please next time you see,  
Someone far worse off than thee,  
Do not laugh and then dismiss,  
That's someone's life you sit and diss.

Fiona Revell