



# *Thinking Green!*

Essays on Environmentalism,  
Feminism, and Nonviolence

PETRA K. KELLY

Foreword by Peter Matthiessen



Parallax Press  
Berkeley, California

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## *Preface*

Some months after Parallax Press' 1991 publication of Petra Kelly's *The Anguish of Tibet*, we reached an agreement with Ms. Kelly to publish a book of her writings about ecology, feminism, nonviolence, human rights, North-South relations, and a host of related topics. She forwarded to us more than one thousand pages of speeches, interviews, and articles, which editor Andrew Cooper began organizing into this book.

In September 1992, when Petra Kelly, Gert Bastian, Stephen Batchelor, and I met over dinner in Berlin to discuss the book's development, Petra gave me another thousand pages of documents. We talked at length about Tibet, the rise of neo-Nazism in Germany, and many other topics, and shared our mutual excitement about the book's progress and the work needed to complete it. She also asked in great detail about my wife's brother, who had just been in an auto accident. Petra was always extremely thoughtful and concerned, not only about the big issues, but about everyday people and events. She and Gert gave us a box of Berlin chocolates, and also a piece of the Berlin Wall, which she herself was so instrumental in bringing down.

In less than a month, Petra and Gert were found dead, having been shot in their small house outside of Bonn.

Although there has never been an extensive investigation, official or unofficial, the authorities concluded that Gert shot Petra, then himself. I continue to find that difficult to believe or accept, as they both had been so energetic and forward-looking such a short time before.

After a period of mourning and reflection, we at Parallax Press decided to go ahead and complete this project, with the help of many of Petra's close friends and colleagues around the world, including Charlene Spretnak, Sara Parkin, Claire Greensfelder, Cora Weiss, Peter Matthiessen, Eleanor LeCain, Abdul Aziz Said, Philip Bogdonoff, Kirkpatrick Sale, Vandana Shiva, Tom Ginsburg, Maria Duerr, and Mark Hertsgaard. Special thanks are due to Andy Cooper, who combed through all of Petra's papers, established the outline of the book, and did all of the initial editing, and Margaret Kelly, Petra's mother, whose cooperation and support have been most heartening.

Our deepest wish for this book is that it serve as a tribute to Petra K. Kelly, one of the great peacemakers of the twentieth century, and that it also serve in some small way to help bring about the kind of world Petra worked so hard all her life to create.

Arnold Kotler, Publisher  
Parallax Press  
Berkeley, California  
March 1994

# Foreword

PETER MATTHIESSEN

Petra Karin Kelly worked with tireless dedication for the most vital causes of our times—peace, human rights, the environment—with an intense morality and selflessness that fairly shone in a public world of expedience, compromise, and greed. Indeed, her pioneer work as a founding spirit of the German Green Party remains an inspiration to organizations and individuals around the world. *Thinking Green!*, an edited collection of her talks, is an impassioned, clear, and cogent exposition of the critical ideas in a burning crusade for humanity that became her life and brought about her death.

*The failure of traditional military philosophy, with its hollow phrases like “just war” and “surgical strikes,” was made tragically apparent by the Gulf War. The mass murder of innocent people did not solve any problems, but only created a host of new ones.... The macabre scenario of Desert Storm proved many of the warnings and predictions we Greens have been expressing for so many years. In the almost prophetic peace manifesto published just after the Green Party was founded, we highlighted the devastating consequences of a consumer lifestyle and manufacturing methods that are based on the steady flow of natural resources recklessly squandered, leading to the violent appropriation of foreign raw materials. In this light, the Gulf War was a harbinger of future conflicts that will arise in*

*the global struggle for increasingly scarce natural resources. (Thinking Green! pages 121-122)*

*There can be only one answer concerning when to start Green politics at every electoral level in the United States: right now. Because of the need for a low-energy future; because the Earth's remaining rainforests are being destroyed to meet the interest on debt repayments from poor to rich countries; because over 20 million Americans do not have enough to eat; because we must divert funds from military spending in order to solve terminal environmental, economic, and social problems; because human rights and civil liberties cannot be matters of political expediency; because we must replace consumption with conservation as society's driving force; because we can no longer ignore or neglect the years of warning signals telling us that we have come face to face with the natural limits of what we can take from the Earth; because the Earth has no emergency exit; because we can no longer sit by and watch Western governments be driven by endless expansion of consumption and by the futile goal of economic growth at any cost—for these and countless other desperate reasons, we must present Green alternatives in the U.S.A. (Thinking Green! page 131)*

Together with her companion Gert Bastian—a German general who left the Army after protesting the deployment of American missiles in Europe, and worked unceasingly thereafter for pacifist causes—Petra Kelly persevered bravely against political apathy and cynicism, calling for an end to the nuclear menace, the shocking violations of human rights occurring in Tibet, and the resurgence of neo-Nazi gangs in her own country, which, according to press reports, have been sending threatening letters to Greens leaders.

I first met Petra Kelly and Gert Bastian at an environmental conference at Morelia, in Mexico, in late August and early September of 1991, a conference based not only on “the Environment” but on many of the problems that are part of it—human rights, the survival of indigenous peoples, nuclear disaster and pollution, the future of the planet. Many of the conference participants were scientists, and most had special interest in one or two related fields; for Kelly and Bastian, all problems were of special interest, even those they had not encountered before, and this interest was not abstract, intellectual, but expressed itself at once in deep concern for the human beings affected.

For example, the nuclear physicist Vladimir Chernousenko, as a consequence of his work at the Chernobyl “cleanup,” was chronically ill throughout the conference, and Petra and Gert were among the first to visit him in the hospital and solicit financial help among the rest of us, and they persisted in this faithfully once the conference was over, organizing support for him in Europe until the day they died.

A few months after Morelia, I was giving a talk in Miami when I spotted Gert and Petra waving and smiling, right in the first row. She was in Miami for a feminist convention, and had discovered—very little escaped her attention—that I was in town, too. We had supper that evening after the talk, and again the next evening—there were always so many ideas to exchange with Petra, talking and laughing with that glee in life, at the same time weeping with frustration and real pain over the many things that hurt her, both emotions twinkling in those dark eyes at the same time, like sun in rain.



In a group, Petra bubbled over with her plans and often did most of the talking, but with just the three of us, she was much calmer, and content to let Major General Bastian, former commander of the 12th Tank Division, talk about their common projects. Though he deferred to her (as to a hurricane), this kindly man was passionate in his quiet way, speaking at moments with cold irony and true contempt for the cowardice and hypocrisy so epidemic among so-called world leaders who were not true leaders, merely politicians, not only willing but eager to risk the future of humanity with any compromise at all that might grease the skids for their own reelection.

One exception, of course, was His Holiness the Dalai Lama, of whom Petra always spoke with the greatest respect and affection, and we also discussed other such heroes as Gandhi and Cesar Chavez, whose outrage at social injustice drove them to ignore contemptible excuses such as *What can just one little person do?* As Petra and Gert knew better than most, that attitude in their own land had done much to let loose the Nazi evil, and might do it again, in any land, if we were not vigilant. (Lately I have been quoted as commenting that, due to certain restraints on the police, the U.S., compared to many other countries, “is a very easy country to be brave in”—*if you are the right color*, I meant to add. As Kelly points out, “The U.S. Constitution isn’t bad. It offers a lot of scope for resistance. But it’s not enough to say, ‘We’ve got a good democracy.’ We must develop and improve it.”

We agreed, passionately, that all of the critical problems we were discussing were related ( “*Questions of international law and human rights are indivisible*”—*Thinking Green!* page 79) and that every one of them might be solved if *everyone* did *something*—nothing showy or heroic, neces-

sarily, just something for the common welfare, if only a strong letter to a politician or the local newspaper. Not that the talk was grim—the talk was fun! Petra had a great infectious laugh like a little girl, and Gert, too, had a dry laconic humor. He seemed tired, but living with Petra was tiring, and both admitted it.

In June 1992, Petra rang up to ask that I telephone Gert in a German hospital, to help cheer him up after a crippling accident he had suffered in April. He sounded fine, of course, since he was ever gallant. I was in Asia for most of that summer and did not speak with them again until September, before they left for the World Uranium Hearing in Salzburg. This time it was Gert who called from Bonn, sounding well and happy and enthusiastic, to ask me to endorse Petra's nomination for the Andrei Sakharov Award; next came a letter from Petra with the usual exclamation marks all over everything, to ask if I would write the foreword for this book. In *Thinking Green!* this astonishing woman meant to deal with the Environment, Non-violence, Nuclear Proliferation, Feminist Principles, Problems in Eastern Europe, the Suppression of Tibet—in short, the lot!

How shocking, then, that on October 19, a Monday evening, their executed bodies were found in their house in Bonn, having lain undiscovered for at least two weeks, possibly three. On Tuesday, well before an autopsy or post-mortem could be performed, the police announced, "We are certain of one thing, which is that a third person was not responsible for the deaths...." Perhaps they were right, but *how* were they so certain? And why did they feel obliged to make such a premature declaration, knowing that any secret service (or well-trained operatives) could fake every circumstance that was described, and in the light of

the many well-known threats that Gert and Petra had received—these same police who had certified Petra Kelly as “an endangered person”!

I did not know Gert and Petra long—nor even, in the usual sense, “well”—and I am aware (they were quite undefended about it) that they had serious financial and emotional problems. Even so, they did *not* sound like people who would die within two weeks in a murder-suicide, far less in a suicide pact, less still in a willful act without a note of explanation to close friends or even the aged relatives they were close to and taking care of. (Yet there *were* letters, written by Gert that very evening, an innocuous letter to his wife, an innocuous business letter to his attorney, which was not only unfinished but broken off in the middle of a word. That letter was still in his typewriter, which was still running when the bodies were discovered two weeks later, but there was no word of any kind to the thousands of people for whom they embodied the courage and commitment and hope that might still spare our world from the fate we seem so determined to visit upon ourselves.)

This is one reason all their friends are so disturbed—this very strong scent of unfinished business. I ranged around the house and tossed in bed, unable to make my peace with such news for days after—something was wrong, something was missing, something was not known.

Or perhaps the “something that was missing” was simply Gert and Petra—“these pure, blameless, and holy children of our universe,” as Vladimir Chernousenko called these extraordinary people who gave themselves to us so bravely and so selflessly.

I think how sad their friend the Dalai Lama must be, all the more so as a Buddhist who believes that the man-

ner and the moment of dying is so critical to well-being in a future life. How wonderful that such a meditative man would encourage Petra in her activism, saying, "I will do your meditation for you."

I had told them in Morelia how shocked American Indian people were that white people seemed so willing to leave such a polluted and diminished world for our children and grandchildren, and Petra had grown increasingly interested in the symbolic case of Leonard Peltier and other Indian problems. In what may have been her final article (it appeared in *Newsday*, October 22, 1992, three days after the discovery of her body and several weeks after her death), she wrote about her hopes for a shift in U.S. policy after the election, beginning a long list of the critical problems that needed to be "healed" (not solved, notice, but *healed*—that was her way) with "initiating a policy of justice for native Americans."

I reread her letters. A wild letter in March 1992 concluded:

*We wish you were here. We feel very close to you.... Hope you won't forget us!*

I won't forget them. Nobody who knew them will forget these vital, generous people. They are gone too soon, leaving a great hole in our hearts and in our lives.

Peter Matthiessen  
Sagaponack, New York  
January 1993

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*Thinking Green!*



## Introduction

*"I still believe that people  
are good at heart."*—Anne Frank <sup>1</sup>

My sister, Grace Patricia, died of eye cancer in 1970, at the age of ten. I always wonder why such a beautiful girl had to die so young. Was it because of the nuclear power plants that kept breaking down near our home in Virginia, or because her father, my stepfather, was in Hiroshima as a young soldier just a few weeks after the atomic bomb exploded? Was the cancer worsened by the radiation treatment she received? When Grace died, I resolved to do everything in my power to inform people about the military and civilian uses of nuclear technology and to participate in whatever ways I could to campaign nonviolently against it. I vowed to dedicate my life to finding out why so many millions have become cancer patients and why we are all atomic hostages in this radioactive age. There has always been a mysterious connection between Grace and me. I know she is watching me and guiding me in my work. The way she lived—smiling, loving, hoping, and enduring so much pain—has given me all the guidance and inspiration I have needed to carry on my political, ecological, and feminist work.

I was born and raised in Germany, but because I lived in the United States for ten years, I have both a German

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<sup>1</sup> *The Diary of Anne Frank* (New York: Bantam Books, 1952), p. 263.



and an American perspective. I am from Günzberg, the Bavarian town on the Danube that is also the hometown of Dr. Joseph Mengele, the “Angel of Death” of Auschwitz. Until I was thirteen, I was raised by my grandmother, an antifascist before and during the time of Hitler. Omi (a German term of endearment for “grandmother”) was always extremely courageous. As a war widow, even through the hardest times, she managed to take care of my mother and me. When I was six, she began to read to me from newspapers and newsmagazines, explaining each article in a simple yet precise way. It was clear to her that women must be allowed to pursue whatever interests they choose. Except for my years in the United States, Omi has always been at my side. During the 1970s and ’80s, she walked with me in the streets of Germany and Ireland, protesting nuclear power plants and weapons, police terror, and the criminalization of pacifists, actively supporting me through four electoral campaigns, helping with all the grassroots work even in the harshest weather. Whenever I feel I cannot go on, I think of her and I feel a resurgence of strength. The way she has lived her life—with honesty, modesty, and courage—has had a profound influence on me.

My mother has also been a very important influence. She needed no men to help her determine her life and her future. After an unhappy marriage and divorce in Günzberg, she set an example of integrity and independence. She too got much of her energy from Omi.

I was a devout Catholic. I attended convent school and, as a young girl, contemplated becoming a nun so I could play guitar and sing to the children in Africa, while, at the same time, trying to feed them and help them be healthy again. But I broke with the Catholic church when I real-