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Judy Gumbo Albert, Ph.D., was an original member of the Yippies, a late 1960's countercultural group. The Yippies levitated the Pentagon to end the Viet Nam war, brought the New York City Stock Exchange to a halt to satirize greed, and ran a pig for President. Judy helped found one of Berkeley's early women's groups, wrote for the Berkeley Barb and helped start the Berkeley Tribe. After Judy visited the former North Viet Nam in 1970 she returned to help stage the Women's April 10th March on the Pentagon and Mayday demonstrations. Judy discovered a tracking device on her car in 1975 and became part of a lawsuit that successfully challenged warrantless wiretapping. Judy has taught Women's Studies and Sociology at the State University of New York at New Paltz and Mills College, but spent the majority of her career as an award-winning fundraiser for Planned Parenthood. Judy is co-author of The Sixties Papers: Documents of a Rebellious Decade (1984) and is currently completing Yippie Girl: My Romantic Adventures in Love and Protest. Judy recently published "Bugged" in The Times They Were A-Changing: Women Remember the 60's and 70's (SHEWRITESPRESS, 2013) and "Back to Viet Nam 1970-2013" in Counterpunch, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/01/13/back-to-vietnam/> Find Judy at: www.yippiegirl.com or on Facebook.

BUGGED

By Judy Gumbo Albert, Ph. D.

INTRO: *An agent from the NSA walks into a bar. The bartender asks: Hey, you wanna hear a good joke? The NSA agent says: I already heard it.*

I wrote this piece before Edward Snowden's magnificent revelations. It won third prize for and was subsequently published in the book Times They Were Changing, Women Remember the 1960s and 1970s. I am no techie or expert in meta-data, what's changed since I wrote it is not the authoritarian patriarchal and fear-based mindset of the NSA, CIA, FBI and other police agencies, but rather the technology and magnitude of government compliance which now surveills millions of people – including populations of entire countries -- here and across the globe.

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Attempts have been made to interview SUBJECT, (THAT'S ME) however, during these attempts SUBJECT, inside her apartment, was able to avoid facing the interviewing agents and made the statement, "See my attorney" through the door. Another attempt

will be made to interview SUBJECT at New York. This attempt will take place while SUBJECT is on the street or getting in to a car. A face to face confrontation is deemed worthwhile. (FBI BuFile #100-451-802)

I remember a time when all my friends suspected they were under surveillance. It may have been true. It may have been the myth of being watched revived our sense of self-importance at a time when our power to change the world was ending. My boyfriend Stew and I had once been Yippies. Yippies used the media to create myths that were bigger than reality: we ran a pig for president, brought the New York Stock Exchange to a halt by throwing money at stockbrokers and levitated the Pentagon. By 1973, we might as well have crumbled what remained of our Yippie legerdemain into a pot pipe and smoked it. The FBI neither forgave nor forgot. Agents would come knocking on the black metal door of Stew's and my New York City apartment with monotonous regularity. I'd grab the four feet long steel rod that braced the deadbolt into my floor and verbally abuse them from behind my closed door. Fed up with this hyper-vigilant life, Stew and I decided on an impulse to quit New York City, to leave the FBI and our public lives behind.

In early summer of 1973, Stew and I rented a tiny cabin in the Catskill Mountains off Highway 28A, two and a half hours north of New York City, a half hour drive from Woodstock, up a hill behind a trailer occupied by two lanky, elderly alcoholics who I'd hear argue with each other as I'd ride by. The front lawn outside our cabin was a cushion of aromatic brown pine needles where I could sit, roll a peaceful joint and listen to Senator Sam Ervin, a hoot owl on the radio say, "Ah'm just a simple country lawyer," as he took the Nixon Administration apart. A balmy October seduced me with its warmth and downpour of red, yellow and gold leaves. I had determined to continue to live a Yippie life: provocative, oppositional, and, as much as Stew and I could make it, neither paranoid nor serious. Still, both paranoia and seriousness dribbled into

our mountain refuge. One friend, terrified by the war on African-Americans and the counterculture disguised as the war on drugs, escaped New York City during a drug scare instigated by that same Governor Rockefeller who ordered the massacre of prisoners at Attica. My friend deposited with us a green plastic garbage bag filled half way up with low-grade marijuana. I buried her stash under a fence of flat gray stones that some forgotten pioneer had piled one on another to mark our property line. Rip Van Winkle, or so the story goes, had inhabited these very mountains. I told myself I hid the pot in case Rip woke up looking for a toke. Still, after that visit, I revived my City habit of listening for clicks on the phone.

One morning I watched a line of hunters in red plaid jackets and green caps emerge out of the mist outside my cabin. Shotguns at the ready, they marched in military formation over leaves the color of mahogany. I did not acknowledge to myself that these men could be anything more than what they appeared. Instead, I yelled,

“This is private property! No hunting allowed!”

“Pardon us ma’m,” replied the trespassers replied, and tromped on down my hill.

* * *

In early winter of 1975, Stew and I decided to visit the urbanity of New York City, to inhale its excitement while taking the opportunity to drop in on Bill Kunstler and Margie Ratner, friends who happened to be lawyers. I hoped that such a visit would help dispel the paranoia that now threatened to despoil our isolation.

In the City, I parked our yellow Volvo close by Bill and Margie’s Gay Street home in Greenwich Village. I could not put my finger on it exactly but the air around me felt charged with suspicious ions. I spotted (or so I thought) a man in a beige trench coat and fedora lurking in the dark shadows of a nearby stairwell. I ignored him.

“This is New York.” I told myself. “Everybody lurks in New York.”

Early in the morning of December 13, Stew and I returned to our car. Again, I saw a man. This time his trench coat was black. I watched him scurry down the sidewalk, a rat exposed to daylight. I worried I’d succumbed to New York City paranoia. Then, in one of those moments for which I am forever grateful, I decided to walk around my car’s perimeter. Looking for I knew not what. Which is exactly when I saw it. A smear in the middle of the rear bumper, as if some employee at a carwash had tried to wipe away the dirt I had accumulated on the trip down. In the center of the spot, a black wire hung down, six inches long. I squatted in the gutter, avoiding a stream of gray ice red water as best I could and contemplated the wire. The curiosity I’ve had my entire life trumped any foreboding. I called Stew over.

“Whaddaya think this is?” I asked.

Stew looked at the wire, stroked his beard, shook his head, but made no comment. He’d grown up in New York City and knew nothing about cars. I’d tried to teach him to drive once on an empty Catskill road but cut my lesson short after he’d growled his way through two stop signs without stopping. Still, I needed Stew’s reassurance. Three weeks earlier, in a fit of know-it-all feminist machismo, I’d installed a new battery in my Volvo by myself, poles reversed, and sent the car’s electrical system up in smoke.

I’ve subsequently learned that fear can breed recklessness in addition to passivity. I told myself that if the wire came from a bomb placed underneath my car by the FBI or some God knows who right-winger, going out in a flaming blaze of glory would be a quintessential Yippie act. Such a death might at least attract the media.

“You wait on the sidewalk.” I commanded. “I’m going to turn the engine on and see if it starts.”

Stew refused. He sat down heavily in the passenger seat. He told me later he did not want to see a headline that read: “Sexist Survives.”

I turned the key. No expectant silence. No click. No explosion. The Volvo’s engine kicked in. My breath rushed out of my lungs as if escaping jail. I returned to the rear of the car and knelt once more in the freezing slush. I reached my arm up behind my No Nukes bumper sticker. My fingers brushed an object I knew did not belong. I tugged. My hand emerged clutching a size C battery attached to a piece of ¾ inch black electrical tape. Stew and I spoke in one voice: “Let’s get the fuck outta here.”

The more I navigated 79th Street’s curves through Central Park, the more a caravan of cars - one blue, one green, one beige, all American - followed me. After I reached the West side and turned down Broadway, I spotted a Comidas/Chinois sign blinking in neon red and gold. Across from it was an empty parking spot.

“Time to go for Chinese,” I managed to get the words out. Stew agreed instantly. Chinese food is comfort food for Jews of my generation. I parked, leaving my ancient Volvo to its fate. Stew headed toward the farthest end of the restaurant, his face ashen under his blond curls. An indifferent waiter plopped down two bowls in which barbequed pork and white tofu shards floated like creatures in an oil slick. The soup’s steam smelled like fear would, if fear came coated in tamarind and chili oil.

“Back to Bill and Margie’s,” Stew said after soup had freed his brain to strategize. I agreed. If you think you’re in trouble with the law, the best place to be is with your lawyers. No cars followed us to Gay Street. With longer arms and stronger fingers than I could ever dream of, Bill pulled an object from under the Volvo’s bumper. It was a box. Made of black metal. It was 6” long by 4” wide. The number 107 was scratched on one side. An antenna hung off the other

side, attached by a putty-like substance. Two size C batteries were secured to top and bottom with black electrical tape. All two batteries were intact. Bill said,

“I believe this might be the first time in my experience that one of these was actually found by someone.”

Over the years, I’ve asked myself which of us – me or the FBI -- was the bigger schmuck. I was foolish enough to abandon my car in front of that Chinese restaurant. The FBI agents had replaced the tracking device I’d disabled with a brand new, fully functional one. Had they not done so, all I’d have had to show I was being followed would have been a single size C battery and a piece of crumpled black tape.

In those days before social media, the New York Post helped promote the fact of our surveillance by publishing a photo of Bill, Stew and me. Bill stood behind the Volvo, resignation in his eyes. Stew and I, in our favorite striped Guatemalan vests, cradled the tracking device in our hands. I had a frown on my face. But inside I felt elated. I’d been awarded the grand prize: proof positive that Stew and I were under surveillance. I’d discover decades later that the FBI had vented their frustration with an observation to their superiors worthy of Franz Kafka: “*SUBJECTS are difficult to surveil because they are paranoid about being surveilled.*” But perhaps of greater relevance today is this: on whom, in 1975, did the FBI plant those other 106 devices?

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Not only did the FBI plant a tracking device on my car, they burglarized my cabin and installed a listening device in a light fixture for 10 days. We subsequently sued & discovered that information flow about burglaries, the listening device, and monitoring our mail went all the way up the FBI food chain from field agents to L. Patrick Grey, Acting Director of the FBI. Grey, who was being groomed to succeed J. Edgar Hoover, was indicted in 1978 by the U.S.

Department of Justice for authorizing warrantless break-ins. Also indicted was Mark Felt, the FBI's key decision-maker on domestic spying. Mark Felt turned out to be Deep Throat, the source who spilled the beans about the Watergate burglary that led, ultimately to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. Our slide toward a surveillance state reached its zenith with the Patriot Act after 9/11 which feeds on fear & turns almost all forms of vigorous protest and minor criminal conduct into acts of domestic terrorism. All the acts the FBI committed against us are fully legal today.

Let me conclude with this: If we learned one thing from women's liberation it is that we must never submit to the culture of fear. Everyone in this room could easily be among the millions of alleged but innocent "terrorist suspects" who have had your personal information swept up in a mass of mega data, are monitored because of your ethnicity, what you do, where you work or even because you use Facebook, You-Tube, Google Maps, Skype, Apple or Verizon. In the fearless spirit of women's liberation, let us stand together against the surveillance state however and as strongly we can. Thank you.