

Why I Loved the Ranch looking at the Oregon experiment

Ma Dharmcharya

Osho's commune in Oregon was the hardest thing I ever lived through. It took all my courage to stick it out until one day a layer of negativity that I had hugged tightly to myself finally dropped off. Even after that it wasn't all smooth sailing; Osho was trying to wake us up and the world with us, no matter what the cost. I can't really describe this experiment in human consciousness that we called the Ranch. I can only say what it was like for me to live there, and share my gratitude for this unique opportunity to grow.

To celebrate everything is a completely revolutionary concept and one of the cornerstones of Osho's teaching. "I celebrate myself" is an ecstatic line in one of our songs. When I experienced that celebration, it was an entirely new experience, one that I wanted more of, something I was willing to risk a lot for. There were long periods when I did not look or feel ecstatic during Osho's "drive-bys" and was full of jealous and aggressive thoughts against those who seemed to be having such a good time with him. To turn the mirror back onto myself, onto my anger and jealousy was and still can be painful. It took me a long time to even begin to celebrate.

I had had a so-called "normal" life with a normal job working for the province of British Columbia as a Community Health Nurse. I was bored and disgusted with the hypocrisy of my job as a health educator, and miserable because various therapies had not alleviated the flaws in my life. The older women who had risen in the ranks to supervisory positions were truly frightening to behold. The possibility that I could end up at 60 as controlling and bitter or as frightened and obedient as these poor women inspired me to look for something else.

It takes strong measures to revolutionize a life and the Ranch provided these in plenty. That's why I went there; I wanted to transform myself and Osho was giving us keys, hard keys. I worked as a cleaner, 7 to 7 with tea breaks and a long lunch break. I hated it at first. I believed it to be a low-class job. After a while my body got used to the shock of the hours and the physical exercise. I became healthier than I had ever been and began to have plenty of energy. Because it was simple work, I started to be aware of the appalling rubbish that occupied my mind continuously, an important prerequisite of becoming celebrative. I did not think of myself as a slave working for Osho with no pay.



I regarded myself as extremely privileged to be there at all. At first I lived in a tent on the hill. Though sometimes cold and wet, it was incredibly beautiful – the smell of the sage and juniper, the whole vast space of the sky, so silent. At the end of the first summer, I moved into a house. To have a closet and indoor plumbing was a matter for rejoicing but I missed the sky. Though I cleaned and did laundry for others, when I came home at night it was to a spanking clean house with my laundry neatly folded on my bed. We lived in the houses that we built, ate the produce from our farm and gradually saw the mud and mess of a construction camp fade into irrigation and landscaping.

The breadth, complexity and sheer audacity of Osho's experiment with us in Oregon is even now too vast for my comprehension. What I did comprehend was how much I loved being there. It was such a challenge, that first year, to create a festival for 15,000 people in a hot, barren semi-desert that sported only a few dilapidated farm buildings. Our minds screamed “Impossible!” but we did it, as we created housing, sewage facilities, lights and food. When the sannyasins from the rest of the world arrived they were so delighted to be there. We were so proud and grateful to be ready with tents, food, bathrooms and a place where we could all meditate with Osho.

How much yogurt do you order for breakfast for 15,000 people, and will 15,000 attend or 150? We had to start trusting ourselves and each other. We had to start taking chances. One of the hilarious ironies was that if you knew how to pour concrete you would be in the bakery and the baker would be growing peas. There was no chance to get bored. One day you were a crew leader for a job you knew nothing about, struggling to understand and communicate what needed to be done and then you would suddenly discover that unbeknownst to you, one of your crew had 20 years experience at it. If you were lucky and a little loose, this person would support and help you; if not, life could become really difficult. You could either laugh and give up seriousness and control or be angry and humiliated. This sort of thing happened a lot. Of course the reverse would happen: you could be the one with the experience and be on a crew whose leader didn't know which end of the hammer to pick up. Again, this could be funny or pure hell, it depended on you.

This may sound horrible and chaotic and sometimes it was, but in addition to getting the job done it woke us up, made us strong, and shook up our rigidities. Many of us developed the courage to try anything and learned to take ourselves and our work playfully.

We were out in all this space and sky. It was so quiet at night and the stars so bright. You could wander and never even think of being afraid. It was our place; we built every scrap of it ourselves and we could do what we wanted – have loud Dynamic



Meditation, have a bar and a casino with all the loud music our ears could take, build a place to cremate our dead in a glorious celebrating way. We grew and ate wonderful vegetarian food. Our Master drove by every day, came out to sit with us at festivals and the rest of the time we knew he was there in Lao Tzu, the heart and soul of the place.

I wanted to share my love for the Ranch experience, but it is incomplete without addressing the explosion that occurred when Osho exposed the corruption that we had all been living with. Though he had talked about politics and fascism at length it had remained only words for me. When Sheela left, I heard him say that fascist leaders need fascist followers in order to remain in power. After this discourse I began to see parallels between myself and the average German who closed his eyes and ears to the excesses of Hitler and the SS. Though I had disliked and feared many of the Ranch Òmoms,Ó it was easier for me to doubt myself and hide my feelings and clap and cheer with the rest than to begin waking up and taking responsibility.

It took the shock of finding out the people I had trusted were truly corrupt, the grief at losing the Ranch and the unspeakable horror of seeing our Master jailed and mistreated to make me begin to realize that he meant when he spoke about sheep, that he meant when he talked of abuse of power, that he meant illusions about religion, government and society. These are difficult issues that we all have to deal with if this world is to survive at all. So in a way the whole dŹnouement of our beautiful experiment can also be celebrated. It was a complex lesson about the vital issue of power that we are still processing.

After the Ranch closed I mourned it for a long time. It had been such a rich tapestry. As we successfully met the inescapable demands of our physical reality, there was a parallel growth in our inner world, and this growth is a matter truly to be celebrated. I cannot put into words the depth of this experience nor how juicy it was to live there. Nothing has touched it since.

Originally appeared in Osho Pulse#1 [<http://www.globalserve.net/~sarlo/>]

