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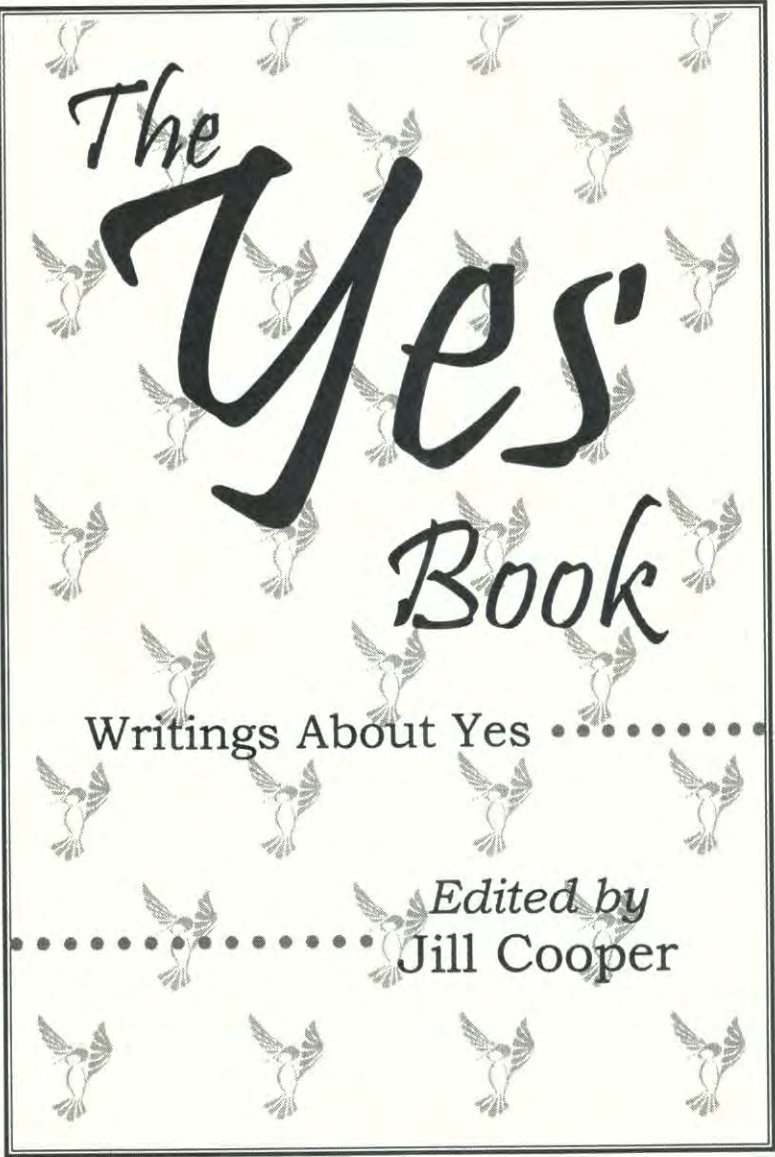
WRITINGS ABOUT YES



EDITED BY JILL COOPER

“If you were left with only one word, what would it be? This book meditates on [the word yes] in stories and poems, a powerful compendium of yeses, a litany of yeses, a choir that praises the one word we long to hear and love the best. Yes.”

—From the Foreword by poet Dorianne Laux



The
Yes
Book

Writings About Yes

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Edited by
Jill Cooper



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Chicken with Feathers!

Ille C. Gebeshuber, Ph.D.

Yes, it is a magic place. The virgin rainforest! Malaysia is a modern, hot, and humid country in Southeast Asia. Lots of high-rise buildings, asphalt on the streets, no sidewalks, no bicycle tracks, everything optimized for car traffic. Many people spend their lives between air-conditioned apartments, air-conditioned offices, air-conditioned cars, and air-conditioned shopping malls. So did I, for the first few months that I lived in Malaysia. I got fed up with this routine pretty fast. I wondered, "Is there anything else to do here apart from shopping, eating, and watching movies?"

I started to ask around and I finally met a woman who said, "Yes, there is. The Malaysian Nature Society. Join them; go on trips with them; get to know the beauty of our natural habitats." Perfect! I signed up for my first trip. Borneo. Magic Borneo. I cried when we landed on the island of my dreams. With four-wheel-drive cars we left the city of Sandakan, already weird and strange and different, heading toward the Danum Valley conservation area.

What I realized first when entering the forest, and what still causes me a lot of joy whenever it happens, especially when the transition is fast, is the change in temperature. Outside, on the streets, it is hot. Unbearably hot—hard to walk, impossible to ride a bicycle. But as soon as I step into the forest, it is cool. Good, nice, fresh air. And the sounds—all different. And the sights. The eye calms down. The heart calms down. The soul starts to fly. In this cool, shaded, tranquil environment, everything suddenly starts to make sense. It all belongs together, it all plays together, it all acts together, all organisms depend and rely on each other and grow together.

Nobody and nothing is useless. Even in death, all creatures serve as food or fertilizer for the others. No major destruction, no money, no rich and poor. What we have instead are circular processes, the perfect realization of the waste-to-wealth concept, local harvesting, sparse usage of metals, and no usage of plastics. The organisms in the rainforest: They grow, they thrive, they all live in their own time, and they are so beautiful. So beautiful. Life in the virgin rainforests still thrives in all its diversity, abundance, joy, and silence. And loudness! Sleeping in a hammock outside, waking up in the middle of the night to the sounds of Borneo pygmy elephants playing on the riverbank—oh yes, I felt that I am a chapter in the amazing living book of life itself, with all its grandeur.

I feel at home as soon as I enter the forest. And I can transfer this to friends, students, and colleagues. I begin to conduct biomimetic jungle walks with kids and grownups, too. But they can't all come to countries where rainforests exist—such as Thailand, India, New Zealand, or Malaysia.

“So you are doing virtual jungle expeditions in countries where no rainforests exist? How about in my country, Austria?”

Yes, it is possible to go on a virtual rainforest expedition in Austria! The kids are excited: “Ahh, we have to walk in a line. Ah, the one in front has to look back frequently to check if the one after him or her is still visible. If not, we just wait. If everybody does this, the group stays together, even without words.” Groups in dangerous habitats do it like this all over the world, the Austrian kids learn from Oliver Futterknecht, my Austrian physics engineering student.

Oliver loves the forest, just as I do. Oliver is good with kids. We leave the Steyr University of Applied Sciences, where we just gave a talk on Malaysia, its animals, and what we can learn from the forest, and we jump on the bus that brings us to the island on the river in the Steyrer Au, Upper Austria. We are a group of fifteen kids between nine and eleven years old, three young adults in their twenties, Oliver, and myself.

“So, although far away from tropical rainforest, kids find a lot of inspiration in semi-wild places?”

Yes! The Steyrer Au is not the jungle. It is a place in the middle of civilization, and it smells like dog shit. I hesitate for a moment, and think, Was this a good idea? But then, living Nature captures us.

We play with plants, with seed capsules that explode when we touch them. We enter the forest and find blue wood. We see snails, with tiny high houses, and I tell the kids how amazing it is that the snails make their minerals, their crystals, at ambient conditions, without heat, without mining, just by local harvesting.

We see a spider and its web. First, the kids are afraid. Ah, a spider. I tell them how they weave their web, which kind of smart backup systems they have in the thread so that it does not break even if a huge insect flies in. I tell them about the golden spider in Madagascar, whose web is so strong that it stops bicycle riders. We find many different empty snail shells. We see rotting leaves, and how mushrooms grow out of the leaves—new life being fed by dead plant material. A girl finds an amber necklace!

We hug trees; we look at the veins of leaves. With amazement, we admire climbing plants that use large trees to climb up toward the sun. We smell soil and talk about slime molds. We touch feathers, realizing how much more sensitive the lips are than the fingers. We think how impressive it is that plants “eat” the gas we exhale and we breathe what plants exhale. We lie on the floor, watching ants communicating with their antennae, and we think about their invisible communication via scents so sublime and different that we cannot smell them. We climb up trees. We collect beauties (but do not harm anything that is alive) and store them in the containers each of us wears for later scientific examination in the lab.

“You mean, time was flying and the impressions were deep and far-reaching?”

Yes! Too soon, the two hours in the forest are over. The world on these 500 meters hasn't changed very much during the last hours, since we left for our virtual jungle expedition, but our perception has changed—and, with it, everything! And this is what's important. We head back to the university, where the microscopes wait for us to examine at high resolution what we collected.

Ah, this is wonderful. They reconnected with Nature. And so fast! I realize, especially in the kids in the city, withdrawal symptoms from Nature that concern me. Last time in Singapore, when we went to see a farm, the kids were pointing at the flock, exclaiming “Chicken with feathers! Chicken with feathers!” For the first time in their lives,

they had seen chicken with feathers. They are only used to the bloodless, featherless, faceless whole chicken in the supermarkets.

Yes! Children need time in nature. Not only is it informative; it makes them happy. Just take them on a walk, outside to the wild, just a tiny little wild spot, even in the city will do, and let them smell, listen, touch, taste, feel, hear, see. The “jungle” is everywhere. And respect for the real thing starts by appreciating the small. No need to rush through life. No need. Enjoy and do good!

*

If you want to hear more on this and other things we can learn from living Nature, listen to Prof. Ille's TEDx talk “What Is a Physicist Doing in the Jungle?: Biomimetics of the Rainforest” on YouTube.

Where else can you find such a rich trove for your life's illumination by the affirmative? We are buffeted by No. It's everywhere. News, fears, frenzy—they all darken this day's door. No is the watchword for much in modern life that is deferred, debased, destroyed. But we are free, remember? ... Yes. Companioned by this book, we have the power to turn and say it. Here are poems, stories, blessings, transformations, confessions, brain research, and deft manifestos that witness for the power of Yes to build attitude into our new way of being.

—Kim Stafford, author of *The Muses Among Us: Eloquent Listening and Other Pleasures of the Writer's Craft*

In *The Yes Book*, seventy-two award-winning novelists, poets, scientists, spiritual teachers, and artists, among others, explore what Yes means to them. With a sparkling mix of voices, these writers express the transformational power of freedom and commitment, of love and loss, of gratitude and surrender, of risking to dream and embracing the results—sharing the hope and wisdom we feel when we say “Yes!”

This vibrant anthology reflects our era's yearning for profound understanding and connection. Illuminating and uplifting, *The Yes Book* is a stunning celebration of life that can help us rediscover our sometimes hidden path to joy.



JILL COOPER is a writer, poet, and editor cultivating the mindfulness, joy, and peace of living a life of Yes, expressing joy through affirmative writing and collaborative projects.

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