

Troubled Ground

A Community Battles for its Own Land

Pascal Sigg



She is used to them. Walls of heavy rain streaming in waves across the windshield. What she is not used to though, are the drops in her face. The first tears. It's all over, she thinks, as she drives home from the meeting of the County Commissioners in December 2010. The rain patters on her windshield. The wipers sweep tirelessly. Water is everywhere. Her hands grip the steering wheel. She sobs. She has long remained confident, has repeatedly reminded her group to remain calm and argue with the facts. Yet now the prospects are as dark as the night she is desperately fighting through. Helvetia's battle appears lost.

Her name is Cherry Amabisca. In December 2010, she feels that the prevalent opinion in the population is that the biggest danger has been deflected. The group has gotten smaller. Many have more important things to deal with. Few still believe in a victory. They're all tired after a year and a half's opposition. The apparently endless resistance against their own government has left Save Helvetia burned out. Cherry is afraid that her fate will be the same as that of the settler who fought against the railroads back then. It will take over a year until another man's idea will rekindle life in the group.

For Cherry it all began in summer 2009. Her neighbor had repeatedly called her. She had repeatedly turned her down. "Let them deal with it", she told herself. Was it because she did not want to get involved or was it because she simply did not have the energy? Her neighbor kept calling her. Cherry ultimately gave in. And one night in June 2009, she sat with other concerned Helvetia residents in the Beinlich's backyard under the giant Sequoias. A woman she did not know was showing a picture of the proposed map around on her mobile phone. "Oh damn", she thought. Her stomach leaped and her heart beat faster. According to the city of Hillsboro's plans, Helvetia would be almost completely built over.

Shopping centers instead of barns. Two-lane freeways instead of gravel roads. Multilevel apartment buildings instead of farms. Although the suburban sprawl which she had so disliked in California, wouldn't reach her house, it would punch deep into Helvetia. "I can help," Cherry said that night. Thus she joined the group Save Helvetia. She had time now. Her father, who she had nursed for seven years, had just died of Parkinson's disease in California. She had no career ambitions any more. She had had to give up her job with Intel after she was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease. She would, however, never abandon Helvetia.

Helvetia wasn't a village. Helvetia was a territory. It was an unincorporated area of about 10'000 acres, twelve miles west of Portland in Oregon. Far in the northwest of the USA. Tractor engines rattled along rural roads and, when the weather was fair, joggers and bikers frequented the few tarred roads. They fled suburbia for the fresh air and rolling hills of the open countryside. For them, Helvetia was the extended backyard of the suburbs where they could stretch and relax. For the inhabitants it was more than that.

Many cultivated their land and provided for their families. Some had been doing this for generations. They didn't live particularly close to each other. Some were friends. Many knew each other. Most mainly concerned themselves with their family, their businesses. There was a winery, vineyards, pumpkin farms and hazelnut orchards in Helvetia. Many farmers cultivated large wheat fields, sold hay or grass seeds. An innovative family was successfully running a CSA with 70 members on a small plot of land. Others had milk cows or grew nursery stock. They all profited from the area's soil. According to Oregon's agricultural department, it was one of the most fertile in the world.

15'000 years ago a gigantic flood inundated vast swathes of Oregon. It left a thick, fertile topsoil and broad river valleys such as the Tualatin Valley between Portland and the Coastal Range. The Atfalati Indians had followed. They lived off game, berries, quamash and lampreys until the first white settlers arrived around 1835. Failed fur traders. They didn't only build new lives as farmers. They also infected the Indians with new diseases. A few years later only a few dozen Atfalati were left in the valley. The news of fertile and almost Indian-free land spread east like wild fire. The most courageous settlers braved long wagon treks across the Rocky Mountains and were rewarded with large homesteads. Many of them came from Europe. By this time the Industrial Revolution was in full swing there.

Cherry knew the history of the area well. In 1987, after a job interview with Intel in Hillsboro, she had driven into the nearby countryside. Past small churches. Past the majestic oaks ringing the fields. Past the red tavern and the century-old farms. Afterwards she called her husband Allen, who had grown up on a farm in Oregon. She did not tell him how the interview went. Instead she told him that she knew where she wanted to live. This was what she had been missing in Arizona, where the cotton fields had been paved over by endless miles of suburban subdivisions. An almost untouched place with a rich history.

It was a Monday afternoon at the beginning of July 2009. Washington County's Reserves Coordinating Committee would be discussing their proposed plan to add land to the cities for development. The public could comment at the end of the event. The committee's job was to coordinate the requests from the individual cities into a countywide plan for development. The committee had been meeting for almost 18 months but only few citizens had weighed in with comments. Not many knew about what was happening. Save Helvetia felt well prepared. Cherry had convinced her 82-

yearold neighbor to come and speak. Brian Beinlich, who ran the group's website, had his video camera with him. Even his 10-yearold son Mason would talk. They could not have known that not their arguments but a stopwatch would play the biggest role.

Cherry looked proud and determined. The tall, trim woman with the short curls and glasses pushed Shirley Malcom forwards in a wheelchair to County Commissioner Andy Duyck. As she saw how the retired teacher with the short gray hair and the friendly eyes stood up out of the chair and spoke she was convinced that Shirley would get the message across. Cherry had come to know the woman well. She had cared for her neighbor after the death of Shirley's husband. Dinners, excursions, rides. The retired teacher had become part of the family. She had experience, she had a Doctor's degree in English. People would listen.

Shirley chose her words carefully, made short breaks and told the story of how her husband and her had been forced to sell their land when they were young. She had hardly begun before she was interrupted.

"Your three minutes are up."

Shirley turned her head right to the man with the trimmed beard and small eyes who was sitting next to her on the chair.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Your presentation's time is up," Duyck repeated.

Amazed, she started up again.

"We must save our rural land. I am sorry that you did not give us a little more time because we really deserve it."

Agitated she sat back in the wheelchair. Cherry was equally shocked as she pushed Shirley back to their friends. "That was rude!" she thought. After she had driven back home, she was amazed. No one had asked any questions after their presentations. They had not been asked to leave like

unwelcome guests, but they had definitely been ignored. Cherry was at a loss. It was only after she visited a woman who she had barely known until then that she knew what to do.

The journalist Tom McCall had been the governor of Oregon from 1967 until 1975. In 1973, he implemented the first state land usage law in the USA. It required the cities of Oregon to develop comprehensive growth plans. The goal had been to protect the best agricultural land and recreational areas. The first Urban Growth Boundary had been drawn around Portland in 1979. A clear line between industrial and agrarian areas. Every five years the limits would be re-discussed — a process which always resulted in political fighting due to the multifarious interests involved.

Because of this, and also to reassure the farmers and business owners, Oregon's senate passed an expanded land use law in 2007. Senate Bill 1011. It stated that a pool of land called "reserves" would be established. The land would be marked as either rural or urban reserve. Rural reserves would be protected for 50 years while urban reserves would be integrated into a new Urban Growth Boundary every five years. The evaluation of potential urban land depended on different factors. "Your presentations can only be successful if they are based on these factors," the woman had advised Cherry in a meeting.

Carol Chesarek had, like Cherry and Brian Beinlich, been employed by Intel. After 19 years she'd had enough of bad bosses and the same routines, so she began to participate in county politics. When Cherry rang at the door of the quiet house in the hills the slim brunette had changed from a highly qualified electrical engineer into a competent citizen activist. Carol didn't just dispense advice that summer afternoon in 2009. She also told Cherry about the decision makers. Four authorities. The coordination committee

was the lowest level. Next the county commissioners would decide about the growth plan for Washington County. Followed by the regional government Metro, which included three counties of the Portland area. Finally Oregon's Land Conservation and Development Commission would decide on the plan. They would all collect the citizens' opinions in both oral and written form. The first hearing would be mid-August. Time was running out. Cherry felt that there was only one thing she could do. She retreated into her garage

From this makeshift office she coordinated the presentations. She identified the factors like the soil quality or the protected species. She recruited neighbors, with whom she had never spoken before, to do research. Elk herds had to be sighted, old oaks counted. She called the media. She saw her daughter and her husband, who was now the sole breadwinner after her severance from Intel, only at dinner. Her biggest problem was the farmers. They didn't know how to write presentations. They weren't comfortable speaking in public. And in summer all the fields had to be cultivated on. Cherry remained focused. She visited the farmers at home. She interviewed them, encouraged them and helped them to write their testimony.

The rest of the group worked flat out, too. The webmaster, Brian, forwarded letters of protesting citizens via the website to the politicians. The freelance programmer with the greying temples, tennis socks and the old Toyota truck had initially not wanted to participate. He had been busy with many job contracts and a 92-yearold mother in Florida, who was being cared for by his brother. Yet now he was in the thick of it. Back in late spring, Brian had founded the group Save Helvetia with other residents. Despite everything, he was ready to give it what he could. Brian Beinlich could run websites and edit video footage. Others raised awareness with posters, postcards and

emails. Farms not Factories! Almost 1400 emails and letters were sent to the politicians. The addressers didn't hold back. A couple wrote:

„What on earth are you thinking of?... Seven thousand acres of Agricultural Foundation Land should not be paved over. Don't "Californicate" Oregon.“ Someone else started his email writing “Unless you are a termite, you can't eat houses.“ They all referred to OAR 660-027-0060(4) – the factors. And they all hoped that the group's hard work would pay off.

She was on at 6.27 pm.

“Grüezi. My name is Becky Sowders.”

The strong woman looked younger than 61. Becky had dressed up for the occasion. White earrings, carefully coifed hair. The light blue corsage and white shirt balanced the oddly relaxed face. Becky was used to performances.

“I am a yodeler with the Helvetia Swiss Alpenglühn Singers. Yollolawoodee — Awoodee — Awoodeeee” The cultural heritage of Helvetia. She told her family's story and concluded:

“I urge you to retain the Helvetia area, in fact all of the area north of Highway 26 as a rural reserve. Thank you”

The three minutes were up. The heavy county chair Tom Brian thanked her with a smug smile for the good entertainment and Becky's laughter filled the room.

She had had to wait for one and a half hours. She had seen the mayors of the cities stand up first. In the crisis more jobs were needed. More building space would create more jobs. She had heard what the others had said before her. Developers, real estate agents. Of course they wanted the same thing. She had noticed that the attention of the commissioners had sunk with each presentation. Drinking coffee, yawning, chatting. But now Becky felt their eyes on her dirndl. The journalists scribbled in their notebooks.

Becky met Cherry for the first time at the annual Swiss Picnic in Helvetia. Before or after the Schoch's presentation of their Swiss cows. On the hot, sunny day the yodeling choir wearing traditional Swiss attire performed songs in Swiss dialect and the alphorn trio shook the walls of the church. At the tables the men were discussing the west coast Swiss wrestling festivals. The women were probably enjoying Donald Guerbers Bernese chalet. He had had it built in 1982. 30 by 32 feet. Three floors. The geraniums were blooming in the boxes outside. On this day the Americans of Helvetia celebrated their Swiss heritage. Becky, who no longer lived in Helvetia, felt that she had to do something for the area. Helvetia was her Switzerland. A home away from home.

Becky's great grandfather's name was Jakob Jungen. As a butcher in the Bernese Oberland region he had been one of the losers in the industrialization. His clients had all moved away to be near to the newly built factories. In order to provide a good life for his family he had to move. In 1889 he had followed his brothers to the New World. They had told him about the opportunities on the other side of the Atlantic. Of how one could really make it with hard work. Of how cheap fertile land was. Of the many Swiss who had already moved out there. Nobody would be alone. He had finally found happiness on a plot of land west of Portland in a small Swiss colony. His neighbours had been called Siegenthaler, Merz, Pieren, Buehler, Guerber and Tschabold. According to an article in the Hillsboro Argus of December 31, 1931, they christened the place with the name Helvetia in 1892 at a school meeting.

Becky quickly realized where the danger in the new reserves plan came from. Helvetia's farmers like the Grossens would still be able to cultivate their land, but the money would change everything. Should the land be

declared an urban reserve, it could be turned into an industrial area every five years. Suddenly it would be between shopping malls and factories. The property taxes would almost double. The land would suddenly be worth up to five times as much. Some of the farmers had already received wild offers. The farmers could no longer safely make big investments in their land. They would fall like dominoes. Any re- zoning would, sooner or later, lead to it being overbuilt.

Cherry was happy with Becky's performance at the hearing in August 2009. The presentations in front of the Reserves Coordinating Committee had been a success. 22 people testified for Helvetia. From cyclists to former county commissioners and farmers. The majority of the opponents to the new reserves plan had been obvious. So obvious that she could feel County Chair Tom Brian's unease. This time Save Helvetia had delivered facts on the factors. She really thought that this time it would have an influence on the plan.

Three weeks later the draft of the reserves plan was approved by the Reserves Coordinating Committee and passed on to the county commissioners. There was no change. Cherry, crushed, tried to understand why. Accurate reading of the vast document, which summarized the suggestions of the planners, gave the answer. Helvetia was not prime farm land, it said. A powerful geo-informational software had said so. The soil was not as fertile as the analysis from Oregon's agricultural department had always shown. Cherry was speechless. She had never heard of this software which had suddenly re- evaluated Helvetia's soil. The text talked about filters, screens and tiers. The Washington County's planners had not changed their argumentation. They had changed the facts.

They had received the program and the request for more land in particularly Helvetia from NAIOP. The National Association of Industrial and Office Properties. In the document, the planners declared up front what NAIOP wanted: “In a coalition with other business interests they demanded that land, which was not compromised by steep inclinations, possible flooding or swamps, should be designated as urban reserve.” Due to the proximity to Highway 26, which connected Portland with the suburbs and the coast, Helvetia’s green fields were too well connected. The lay of the land was excellent.

It was black and white in the document: her own county government wanted to develop about 34’000 acres of land in Washington County, 7’000 of which were prime farmland in Helvetia. Why so much? The numbers were a result of forecasts made by studies. In May 2009, the planners had already presented a first study. They had assumed a massive population increase. By 2060 the county was supposed to have 1.25 million inhabitants. In this analysis the authorities had assumed that the cities in Washington County would continue to grow at the same speed of the past decades. And the population of the area to which Helvetia belonged had more than doubled in the last 30 years.

It had begun in the 1980s. Due to the proximity to California and attracted by tax rebates, many high-tech companies like Intel had brought jobs. With the jobs came the people. Apart from Cherry, many other citizens of Helvetia found jobs at high-tech companies. The tax revenues of the cities rose. Business boomed for the developing contractors and the real estate agents. Almost everyone was winning. No one was asking questions. With the financial crisis many high-tech jobs disappeared. Compared to 2001 the high-tech industry in Oregon offered a third fewer jobs in 2009. The future was uncertain. So it wasn’t surprising that a Metro poll in fall

2009 showed that the inhabitants of Washington County wanted to keep their agricultural land. The majority liked the exercise in the fresh air. They were unhappy with the traffic situation. They felt that no new houses should be built on farmland. 12% even stated that Washington County should not grow any more at all.

Cherry and Brian had believed the forecasts for a long time. Between 1998 and 2005 some of the land in Helvetia had been annexed to the city of Hillsboro. They had been told that Intel and other high-tech companies wanted to build factories. The farmers had believed the politicians and sold the land. When Cherry and Brian were driving along Jacobson Road four years later, they passed once cultivated fields. On the developed plots were warehouses. Square and hard. All the same. Intel and the others had not come. Instead most were local businesses which had abandoned Hillsboro's city center for cheaper rents. A gaming hall, a church. In buildings that had not been built for them. Cherry and Brian drove their cars into a dead end. In front of them, on the ground, weeds were growing. Prickly thistles and blackberry bushes. Grass. The wind would carry their unwanted seeds back into the farmers' fields. Then the sign next to the street. For Sale. The promises of the politicians had been as empty as these lots. Metro must realize what's is happening, they thought.

Metro almost did. After a long back and forth with the three counties, Metro had a reserves plan in spring 2010 capable of winning a majority. The delegates of the regional government wanted to get a move on. Further revisions wouldn't be of any use to anyone, they said. Clarity was important. According to the plan, most of Helvetia would be protected from development for the next 50 years. The potential urban reserve consisted of only 673 acres of prime farm land. A third of which was undesignated. Apparently a real success for Save Helvetia. Originally designed were about

7000 acres. But for Cherry this wasn't enough. It was simple. Excellent land was not to be developed just because it was excellent. It should thus be preserved for future generations. Full stop. So Cherry told the local journalist, who had asked her about the decision, "the fight goes on." For Save Helvetia, two higher authorities remained. First, Oregon's Land Conservation and Development Committee (LCDC). And gradually, the people from Save Helvetia also began to think about the Court of Appeals. Save Helvetia hired lawyers, because they now needed them. They paid the fees out of their own pockets. They appealed again against the plan at the LCDC. The committee composed of seven appointed members did in fact reject the parts of the reserves designated in Metro's map. Just not the ones in Helvetia. Still, Washington County had to go back over the books. A small win at least.

Two months later, in December 2010, Cherry sees the rewritten plans for the first time at a public meeting of Washington County's commissioners. After the meeting, she breaks down in despair on her way home. The commissioners and Metro have compensated for the piece of land that was elsewhere rejected by LCDC with a larger urban reserve zone in Helvetia. Cherry is disillusioned.

In early 2011, the former project manager is well known in Helvetia for her way with people. The mother of two daughters likes to approach people. She got the role as leader of Save Helvetia because she just jumped in and did the work. She has been leading by example. Cherry is known as a people's person who believes in the power of a better argument. Brian Beinlich considers her the best boss he ever had. Without her, he would never have continued doing all his work unpaid. Even if he feels she could be too kind at moments, Robert Bailey also gladly works under her leadership. A year ago she would hardly have agreed with him. But he has

her support now. Despite her unease with his idea. She worries that it's too aggressive.

Robert Bailey had been a part of it since the conception of Save Helvetia in early 2009. Unlike the others, the retired social worker is directly affected by the danger. His cottage with the garden, barn and workshop sits right next to Helvetia Road. Between two roads. Right in the middle of the rectangle the county wants to develop. He is grateful that the others are carrying on the fight for the land. Especially now that it has come to lawyers and money. Robert has worked with Cherry and Brian the whole time. He has also met with farmers and coached them. Held presentations, done testimony. But something about him is different. For him, the fight has always been not only for farmland but even more against an overwhelming opponent. The idea he has in spring 2011 is a Public Records Request.

The Freedom of Information Act permits citizens of to view official documents. This includes the emails of elected politicians. In April 2011, Save Helvetia requested the correspondence. Robert began to dig. What he found supported all his suspicions. The long-time Chair of Washington County, now retired Tom Brian had been the architect of the current reserves plan. He had devised it with his designated replacement, Andy Duyck. On November 10, 2010 Tom Brian had introduced the plan of the land swap in Helvetia to his chief planner. In an email he wrote, "We are attempting to keep these ideas CONFIDENTIAL and do not want to give potential opponents any more lead time than legally provided." The authorities were in a rush. Especially Tom Brian. He only had a few weeks left as Washington County Chair.

Four days later, Brian wrote again, "I want to make sure we have three solid votes on the current AND future boards." From the rest of the email it was apparent that he meant the five Washington County Commissioners as well

as Metro. For Brian, the vote looked good in Washington County. The Metro needed a bit more convincing. So on December 8, 2010, Brian wrote to his assistant: "Please confirm our availability for 12:00 p.m., noon on Friday... Attending: Brian/ Duyck/Collette/Hosticka/Harrington." Apart from him and Andy Duyck, the other three were Metro commissioners. Brian had already convinced Metro president Tom Hughes; with these he had four of the seven Metro council-members. A majority.

After assessing the emails in spring 2011, Robert doesn't know if the meetings actually took place. He can only guess who convinced whom and how. He had known for a while that County Chair Tom Brian wanted that land designated as urban reserves. But the fact that the two councilmen were willing to discuss the plan behind closed doors makes him suspicious. The revised plan with twice as much land for development in Helvetia was passed by Metro in March 2011. Now Robert knows why. At a similar case in Clark County in Oregon county commissioners who collected votes for their budget out of view of the public were fined many hundreds of thousands of dollars. However, he can't quite prove that Brian's and Duyck's deal with Metro was a result of pure backroom politics. The suspicion is hard to assuage. In any case, there has been horsetrading. Initiated by Tom Brian. This doesn't surprise him. Robert has heard from three different sources that Tom Brian didn't just retire from politics. In spring 2011, Tom Brian surfaces a lobbyist for the developers Metropolitan Land Group.

The people from Save Helvetia know that the Metropolitan Land Group is one of the most active construction companies in Washington County. The group buys land, builds houses and rents and sells these. Representatives had repeatedly presented their interest to Save Helvetia. Of course they always wanted more developable urban reserves. What Save Helvetia

doesn't know, however, is that the group belongs to a powerful real estate agent. He stays in the background and only appears in public as a beneficiary. At a children's hospital. At polo tournaments. At his business address, an unremarkable office block on Highway 26, more than 50 companies are registered. Bronco Properties, Lionshare Holdings, Panther Properties. All limited liability companies. Most build, rent and sell in Oregon. Often whole areas of identical housing. In 2005, one such neighborhood reported countless problems with the houses. Improperly sealed facades, windows and pipes. The new owners sued the responsible company for 3 million dollars. In 2010 the culpable company was liquidated. Like 30 before it. This had only little effect on his other companies. With limited liability companies the holding company can only be held responsible to a small degree.

August 2011. It is supposed to be the last hearing. It is about the horse-traded plan with the extra land in Helvetia. Cherry and her friends know the room. Flat screens, microphones, cameras. New wooden furniture, modern mountings and recycling trash cans. Glass, plastic, paper. Metro's conference room in Portland. The hearing is being held before the Land Conservation and Development Commission. The commission was founded in 1973 by governor Tom McCall to protect agrarian land. It has often been called toothless. Would it accept horse-trading between Washington County and Metro? The volunteers are now sitting in a semi-circle, raised behind microphones. Behind the public are the representatives from various authorities. Suits, shirts and ties down to the belt. Black, white, black. They have been given tables. Electricity for laptops. Typing, writing, whispering. Save Helvetia is up after the lunch break. After the Washington County planners, as always. Cherry devours her tuna sandwich uneasily. She is going to present the buffer zone argument. Of course she hopes that LCDC will see through the switch and not tolerate it. But she and her friends don't

believe it. They've been disappointed too often. Cynically, the group will just go through the process. Just put it in the record. Make sure it's all in the files. Important material should they go before the Court of Appeals.

The group presents its arguments. The existing irrigation infrastructure. The superb soils. Tom Brian's duplicity. As Cherry argues that four lane Highway 26 is a better buffer between agrarian and industrial land than the narrow, two lane West Union Road, Washington County Chair Andy Duyck in the back of the room reads the funny pages of The Oregonian. Then the crossword. Legs outstretched and leaning back. He plays with his iPad. Next to him is Tom Brian busily taking notes. When Cherry is asked a question from the podium he furrows his brow. Cherry gives the white-haired chairman of the commission a friendly but firm answer. There are still a thousand acres of land within the city limits of Hillsboro, which have not yet been built up, she argues. One should use those first. After that, further presentations. Interjections. The volunteers' eyelids are beginning to droop. Cups of coffee appear more frequently. At five thirty, LCDC Chair John VanLandingham declares that they will decide the next day.

On decision day, the members of Save Helvetia are just spectators. The appointed commissioners question the Washington County and Metro representatives. Almost all the questions concern arguments put forward by Save Helvetia. Washington County's chief planner with grey hair and rings under his eyes, answers. They included the public as much as was possible, he says. "The people were involved in the process." After a while he stands up and hands the six members a huge pile of papers. His analysis of the land. Re-printed. Suddenly, it is quiet in the room. The two women and the four men behind the microphones re-adjust their reading glasses. Paper rustles, coughing and throat clearing. The Save Helvetia row stares forwards transfixed. Minutes pass.

Then, Chair VanLandingham wants to proceed. The discussion goes zone by zone. Now, Cherry is also taking notes. So is Robert next to her. At the additional plots in Helvetia the commissioners get louder and more energetic. One of them suddenly says, “We don’t want an exchange. And I think that Highway 26 would make a sensible border.” Two further commissioners say the same thing. Cherry brightens up. Robert remains impassive. When it’s VanLandingham’s turn, he says, “It is important to approve new land, especially in these troubled economic times.” On the left side of the room a curly-haired man clenches his fist. Washington County’s chief planner.

The voting goes quickly. One member after another votes for the plan. One would rather have done it differently. But the process has been taking too long. It had to end at some point. 6-0 votes. Not just a further loss for Save Helvetia. Because lawyers are expensive it is also the final one for now. Afterwards they sit on the couch in the hall. Cherry with damp eyes and Brian without movement. Robert, his face as red as his checkered shirt, stares angrily at the room. Nobody is surprised. Yet the disappointment hangs heavily in the air and squeezes their lips together.

A month later, in September 2011, Cherry knows whether to proceed with the Court of Appeals. She is standing on a friend’s alpaca farm high above the Tualatin Valley watching the busy festivities. Over 200 people came. Men, women, children. Native Americans from the reservation. The yodelers and the alphorn players. The people are dancing, partying and conversing. They’re drinking wine from the Helvetia Winery. They’re eating hamburgers from the Helvetia Tavern. They’re buying tickets for the Pie Walk competition. The Helvetia Culture Fest is a great success. It is calming Cherry’s fears.

In the last few years she has thought a lot about one of Helvetia's pioneers. Near the end of the 19th century, a railroad company had wanted to build a track straight through Helvetia. The settlers had barely built their houses before the company annexed the land. If they wouldn't or couldn't raise enough money for a lawyer they would have to move on. No one had tried to stand up to the company. Except one, Moritz Schmidt. He resisted eviction and won. But the case cost him his savings, far more than he would have received for his land. While the railroad had to stop taking people's land as a result of his legal victory, he grew bitter. None of the other settlers, who had profited from his victory, shared the lawyer's costs. In Helvetia, people looked out for themselves. That was when people were still working hard to build communities on the frontier. To bring civilization to the wilderness.

At the 2011 Helvetia Culture Fest, Cherry now finally knows that that settler's fate will not be hers. The Culture Fest and other efforts have brought in over 9000 dollars. This is the confirmation her group so desperately needed. It shows her that they managed to build a community not by bringing civilization to the wilderness. But by doing quite the opposite. By preserving a rural area from being urbanized. There is no going back now. Save Helvetia will take the Reserves proposal to Oregon's Court of Appeals. They now not only have the best soils in the world to fight for. They have a community to defend.

About the author

Pascal Sigg, born 1983 in Zurich, Switzerland. Freelance writer and student. Holds a BA in Journalism from Zurich University of Applied Science. He is currently studying English and German Languages and Literatures at the Universities of Bern and Zurich with particular interest in narratology and nonfiction. He is also a member of the reporter's collective ALSO. A cooperative endeavor of four young freelance journalists in Zurich. Having written several short profiles and features for Swiss newspapers such as Tages-Anzeiger, Sonntagszeitung or Berner Zeitung, in January 2011 he stumbled upon the Youtube video of a woman yodeling against development.

About the story

It was only when I had conducted the first interviews in Oregon in the summer of 2011 that he realized that the story wasn't about a single woman yodeling. But about an unincorporated area fighting for its own land. The nonfiction short story resulted from countless interviews with Save Helvetia protagonists and thorough analyses of official Washington County documents, the media coverage of the process as well as the visit of the two-day LCDC hearing in Portland in August 2011. From June to August 2011, I spent a total of three months in Helvetia and conducted as thorough research as I could. For my sources of information, please consult the following section "Notes".

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Notes & Sources

As noted above, I did not only conduct interviews but was lucky enough to find a wide array of different media output at my disposal online. I could never have written *Troubled Ground* without the work of other journalists.

People whose work was used for this nonfiction short-story include:

Nick Christensen (Hillsboro Argus and Metro)

Dana Tims (The Oregonian)

Elizabeth Suh (The Oregonian)

Roger Gregory (The Oregonian)

Eric Mortenson (The Oregonian)

Brad Schmidt (The Oregonian)

Andy Park (The Oregonian)

Ryan Frank (The Oregonian)

Mike Rogoway (The Oregonian)

Jeff Mapes (The Oregonian)

Christian Gaston (Forest Grove News Times/Portland Tribune)

Steve Law (Portland Tribune)

Jim Redden (Portland Tribune)

John Schrag (Portland Tribune)

Kara Hansen (Portland Tribune)

Karen McCowan (The Register-Guard)

Zach Dundas (freelance writer, GOOD Magazine/Portland Monthly)

Carla Axtman (blueoregon.com)

Brent Walth (author of *Fire at Eden's Gate*)

Additionally, video footage provided by Tualatin Valley Community TV and Brian Beinlich, Helvetia has been used.

The sources for the most crucial claims made in the story are listed below:

Helvetia's top soil quality: Web Soil Survey (United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service)
<http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>

Software provided by NAIOP, growth study: Draft Staff Report, Urban and Rural Reserves Recommendations, Washington County Department of Land Use and Transportation, Long Range Planning Division. August 3, 2009.

Metro Poll 2009: Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall, Inc. Public Attitudes about Quality of Life and Growth Management Issues. August 2009.

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