



SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

# My Pal Sigmund

BY DOUG TOMPKINS

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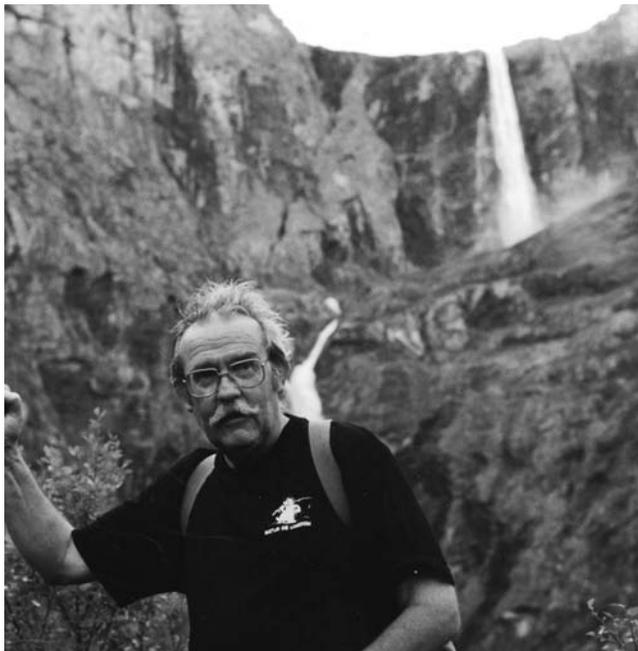
I first met Sigmund Kvaløy Setreng sometime in the late 1980's when I attended some Ecoropa meetings in various places in Europe. I had already been friends with Arne Naess so I was quite prepared to listen to other Norwegian voices in the eco-philosophical circles. Immediately Sigmund and I hit it off and of course as anyone who knew Sigmund understands, he was not a difficult fellow to get to know and get to like. In the ensuing years, our paths crossed often and it could have been at his home in Budal in middle Norway talking late into the night, climbing peaks to place plaques for Peter Wessel Zapffe, attending rallies to keep Norway out of the EU, or in London, or in the United States or he and Kirsten visiting my wife and myself at our home in Chile. Or it might have been to know Sigmund through his writings, his illustrations, his speeches and talks, or even through other

colleagues who used or expanded on his ideas: As environmentalists, political activists, anti-globalists/pro-localists, mountain climbers, jazz fans and deep thinking minded types we had lots in common. It was natural that we became good friends. Above all I think we liked each other for we admired many things we found in each other. I count myself, as at least, president of Sigmund's South American Fan Club!

For many of us who have spent years as thinkers, writers, conservationists, or eco-social activists Sigmund had a profound impact. I can say for myself that he was indeed a "guru" of mine, a great teacher and if I had to get down to just a handful of great books and essays I would put in the top 4-5 of my extensive reading collection, Sigmund's essay and Schumacher lecture, *Complexity and Time: Breaking the Pyramid's Reign*. This is a masterpiece and his distinctions of complex and compli-

cated are forever etched in my mind and my thinking. *Gaia versus Servoglobe* is also one of the very best technology critiques and in the league with the greats like Ellul, Mumford, Illich, Mander or Winner. Rereading that today is to clearly understand how advanced Sigmund's thinking was. I rank him as one of the absolute greats of the last hundred years. Unfortunately too, his ideas, his writing and thinking has not been well enough distributed outside the Norwegian/Nordic world, and hopefully this will be redressed with such publications as this.

Like all vanguard thinkers, they are always ahead of their time and there is a "cultural lag" that takes a while for society to come to understand the leading edge philosophers, thinkers and writers and for events



Sigmund Kvaløy Setreng in front of the Mardøla waterfall, 1995.

PHOTO: STIG OVE VOLL

to play out in real life for their ideas to be well appreciated. What I see is that it is only a matter of time before the world will really "hear from" Sigmund Kvaløy Setreng, that this "cultural lag" is in fact catching up and catching up fast. Recently I was to give a talk in New York City at the Mega-Tech Teach-in at Cooper Union and was pondering on just what to speak about. I procrastinated for months in preparing my talk and as I got more and more anxious wondering what to speak on I re-read *Gaia versus Servoglobe* and had a kind of reawakening to just how far out ahead of all of us Sigmund really was. I contemplated not delivering my own talk but to simply address the audience with a brief introduction saying that there was not much need to labor over what would surely be a second rate speech when I should enlighten the audience by simply reading this essay by Sigmund. After all, it was all there in that one essay what has happened within the techno-industrial culture since and Sigmund articulated it with brilliance nearly thirty years before. What use would it be to try to even improve on it now?! That essay was like good wine, it improved with age.

My recommendation for anyone interested in leading edge thinking is to do a modicum of research and come up with all the writing and recorded speeches of Sigmund's and do the scholarship that I assure will become the basis for a rich and rewarding intellectual leap forward in one's own thinking. I can guarantee it from personal experience that the time it takes to find and read Sigmund's writing will be the best time investment one can make: A life changing experience, for it will forever change the way one looks at the world.

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In 1964, Doug Tompkins founded *The North Face* to make and sell outdoor equipment. A few years later, he headed south on a road trip to Patagonia to climb Mt. Fitzroy, surfing, skiing, and climbing along the way, an adventure documented in the film *Mountain of Storms*. Upon returning, he co-founded *Esprit* clothing company with his first wife, Susie. Under their leadership, Esprit grew into a multinational company with over \$1 billion in sales. In the late 1980s, he became increasingly interested in environmental activism (and disenchanted with promoting a consumer culture), leading him to sell his share of *Esprit*. He created the *Foundation for Deep Ecology*, and turned his energy and personal wealth toward conservation projects. Through a group of nonprofit foundations, Doug and his wife Kristine McDivitt Tompkins have purchased vast tracts of land and then donated them to the national park systems of Chile and Argentina, the countries where Doug and Kris have split their time in recent decades. Doug passed away on December 8, 2015 while kayaking with friends on Chile's Lago General Carrera.