

Olivia Turner

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The Environmental Activism of Hazel Wolf

Over the span of her life, Hazel Wolf was involved in a number of community events, protests, and environmental organizations. Her magnetic personality and intelligence led her to become friends with characters who ranged from widely known celebrities to local prostitutes down the road. Interacting with diverse community members helped her gain different perspectives which fueled her activism throughout her life. Wolf was a witty woman who left a legacy as a relentless advocate for the environment and the low-income communities.

Hazel Wolf was born not in Seattle but in Victoria, British Columbia on March 10th, 1898. After leaving her first marriage behind, Wolf moved to Seattle in 1923 in search of work so that she could support her daughter. Wolf soon fell in love with Seattle and jumped at the opportunity to become involved in the community. Joining the workforce when unemployment rates were at an all-time high during the Great Depression, Wolf turned to the local Communist Party. She remained involved with the communist party until the end of World War II. During this time she helped to organize protests and help people find jobs while also being a strong supporter of women's suffrage and civil rights. She was seen as controversial for these views since she was proud of working with women and people of color in a time when it was more common for people to have misogynistic and racist views. However, despite the disdain she

received from some, she gained two times in love and support from other members of the community.

Due to her involvement in the Communist Party, she was threatened with deportation to Britain. An article by History Link explains that she “fought off a 14-year effort by the federal government to deport her as a threat to national security.” Of course, she won against the government by earning her U.S. citizenship in 1949.

Although Hazel Wolf successfully worked with unions and civil rights groups, one of her greatest passions that she was known for was her love for the environment. In an article by History Link, Wolf was said to often connect with tribes in the Northwest. The meetings that they held were heavily focused on conservation and designing programs to give back to the environment. Like most other indigenous tribes around the world, the tribes of the Pacific Northwest have a strong connection to nature. Many still engage in their traditional hunting and gathering techniques that are waste-free and gentle on the environment. Several of these tribes have found ways to stop overfishing and overhunting in their communities so that they can prevent negative impacts on the wildlife population. However, climate change soon began to impact the ways that they hunt and fish due to inconsistent weather changes and ocean acidification.

Knowing this, Wolf had goals to raise awareness on climate change and how it can create challenges for indigenous people and low-income communities. One of Wolf’s greatest environmental successes was the 1974 Bold Decision. This resulted in Washington tribes being granted half of all salmon in their rivers (Humanities and Social Sciences Online). Wolf’s hard work brought indigenous groups and environmental organizations together to find common causes to fight for and many of these alliances still stand today.

Hazel Wolf was also involved in a great number of environmental organizations. Two of these being the National Audubon Society and Seattle's Community Coalition for Environmental Justice. She was a member of the National Audubon Society for 35 years where she worked as a secretary and ambassador. Audubon is a non-profit organization that prioritizes the protection of birds and their environments. Wolf loved this organization not only because it supported environmental conservation but also because she loved birds very much. Her favorite bird, and arguably her favorite animal, was the Brown Creeper. According to Bird Note, the Brown Creeper became her favorite bird after seeing it on a walk in Lincoln Park. She later compared herself to the bird in many speeches and several people even consider it to have been her most used speech. Wolf was also very connected to Seattle's Community Coalition for Environmental Justice. Although she had an obvious passion for the environment, this connection may have been personal due to growing up very poor. This made it easier for her to put herself into the shoes of people experiencing environmental injustice. Formed in 1993 the SCCEJ's mission is to prevent climate change from negatively impacting low-income communities and places heavily populated by POC. She often made a point that white middle and upper-class individuals will never have to see or experience this type of injustice and that is why it is so overlooked. This organization is one that kept her very involved in the community and always looking for an opportunity to help.

Even in her late years, Wolf was still as active as ever. She remained involved in the community by participating in protests, delivering speeches, regularly attending organizations she was a part of. According to Mohai, despite being 88 years old she protested the development of nuclear weapons in Hanford, Washington. 22 years later her activism has left every community touched and impacted by her passion and a strong sense of character. One of the greatest pieces of

personal history that Hazel Wolf leaves behind is a short book on her life which was composed by Susan Starbuck and took them roughly 20 years to complete.

I chose Hazel Wolf because I see much of myself and my beliefs in her. She is a person who involved herself in many diverse activities, passions, and organizations. It makes you wonder how she managed to balance it all while being a single mother. It is also fascinating how she became a major social figure while also being involved with Seattle's Communist Party, women's suffrage, civil rights, and indigenous communities. Her involvement came during a time when the world was rapidly changing for women and people of color as climate change became a rising problem for communities around the world. I find her life very inspiring, even more so since she was able to actively participate in her beliefs as she aged. Hazel Wolf died at 101 on January 19th, 2000, and had roughly 900 people attend her funeral, a representation of how she was deeply loved and strongly remembered in Seattle.

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