

OPINION

Now & Again

Rain forest rider opens some eyes

By Jeff Chappell
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I've often been criticized for being a cynical person. Friends, ex-girlfriends, parents, relatives, co-workers — I've heard it from every corner, and with just cause. They're right. From religion to relationships, my views are pretty grim compared to most.

But like most journalists I also have a streak of idealism — the world really sucks and I'm out to change it. Yet, in the daily grind of classes and holding down two jobs, sometimes I lose sight of it.

Occasionally, though, something happens to remind me why I got into journalism — why I hold two jobs on top of classes and worry about deadlines and gripe about sources and column inches. One of these somethings happened Sunday morning when I met Lucian Spataro.

As I stood on the berm of the Appalachian Highway on that cool, breezy morning and talked with this guy astride his white Arabian horse, I was taken by a sense of urgency in his voice as he spoke of the rain forests. My idealistic streak, which had lain dormant for a long time, came alive.

It came alive with good reason. This guy had taken a year — *a whole damned year!* — off from his life to ride across America to raise awareness of a problem that few people know much about but which most likely will determine the course of the world. Spataro's not making any money at it; he hasn't even raised nearly the amount of money he wants to donate to the Rainforest Action Network.

Granted it's something he has always wanted to do, but how many people would allow a year's interruption in their lives for a worthy cause and then not gain anything?

Furthermore, most people who hear about Lucian Spataro will probably forget about him and

the plight of the rain forests by next month. (Here comes the cynicism!) They'll talk about it for a day or two at work or at dinner and then forget about it, as apathy takes over; it's just another problem the media blows out of proportion.

But perhaps a few people across the nation will have had their eyes opened. Perhaps even this column will incite someone to pay more attention to this issue and others.

Even if it's only one person, that would be worth it. It would make it worthwhile sacrificing a chance to party on Saturday night and awaking early Sunday — all to talk to Lucian Spataro on a cold, dreary morning. I can't speak for Lucian but I think he would agree that it was worthwhile.

You may not get a chance to read this, Lucian, and our paths probably won't cross again. If not, I'm glad I met you, and thanks for the kick in the idealism. Good luck with your part in changing the world. I'm glad I could help.