



Truth is for Cowards

“For years, the big garbage companies worked overtime to discredit and stop the recycling bandwagon,” says longtime activist Doug Spaulding of Recycle Berkeley, a.k.a. “Re-Be.” “Now they don’t just want to get on the bandwagon. They want to buy the whole thing and kick the rest of us off.”

—Brian Hunter, “The Garbage Shortage,”
East Bay Beat, September 30, 1998

[SUNDAY. OCTOBER 11. 9 A.M.]

I see Doug before he sees me, and I pause in the shadow of the Re-Be gate to watch him. He’s driving a dusty yellow John Deere forklift, precariously balancing five bales of cardboard and drumming his hands on the steering wheel. He’s wearing headphones and singing, but I can’t hear him above the groan of the engine.

His frayed jumpsuit, dotted with oil stains and holes, looks like it will disintegrate in the next wash, and his graying ponytail pokes out the back of his orange and black Giants baseball cap. It’s his carefully cultivated Joe Working Class Hippie look, but he grew up in the high-hat suburbs of San Diego and has a Ph.D. in Biology.

I take a breath—dealing with Doug takes an extra shot of oxygen—and stroll into the yard. Doug drops the bales onto a flatbed truck, zips away in reverse, and skids to a halt. He leans into a turn with his shoulder, and grimaces as if his shoulder is bearing the weight. When

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“I want to show you what we’re up against,” he says. “I will not be fuckin’ intimidated.” Doug, have you heard of hello?

An hour ago, he woke me with a phone call, growling, “You want

18

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