INTRODUCTION

WHEN I BEGAN my professional career as a forester, I knew about as much about the hidden life of trees as a butcher knows about the emotional life of animals. The modern forestry industry produces lumber. That is to say, it fells trees and then plants new seedlings. If you read the professional literature, you quickly get the impression that the well-being of the forest is only of interest insofar as it is necessary for optimizing the lumber industry. That is enough for what foresters do day to day, and eventually it distorts the way they look at trees. Because it was my job to look at hundreds of trees every day—spruce, beeches, oaks, and pines—to assess their suitability for the lumber mill and their market value, my appreciation of trees was also restricted to this narrow point of view.

About twenty years ago, I began to organize survival training and log-cabin tours for tourists. Then I added a place in the forest where people can be buried as an alternative to traditional graveyards, and an ancient forest preserve. In conversations with the many visitors who came, my view of the forest changed once again. Visitors were enchanted by crooked, gnarled trees I would previously have dismissed because of their low commercial value. Walking with my visitors, I learned to pay attention to more than just the quality of the trees' trunks. I began to notice bizarre root shapes, peculiar growth patterns, and mossy cushions on bark. My love of Nature—something I've had since I was six years old—was reignited. Suddenly, I was aware of countless wonders I could hardly explain even to myself. At the same time, Aachen University (RWTH Aachen) began conducting regular scientific research programs in the forest I manage. During the course of this research, many questions were answered, but many more emerged.

Life as a forester became exciting once again. Every day in the forest was a day of discovery. This led me to unusual ways of managing the forest. When you know that trees experience pain and have memories and that tree parents live together with their children, then you can no longer just chop them down and disrupt their lives with large machines. Machines have been banned from the forest for a couple of decades now, and if a few individual trees need to be harvested from time to time, the work is done with care by foresters using horses instead. A healthier—perhaps you could even say happier—forest is considerably more productive, and that means it is also more profitable.

This argument convinced my employer, the community of Hümmel, and

now this tiny village in the Eifel mountains will not consider any other way of managing their forest. The trees are breathing a collective sigh of relief and revealing even more of their secrets, especially those stands growing in the newly established preserves, where they are left completely undisturbed. I will never stop learning from them, but even what I have learned so far under their leafy canopy exceeds anything I could ever have dreamed of.

I invite you to share with me the joy trees can bring us. And, who knows, perhaps on your next walk in the forest, you will discover for yourself wonders great and small.