

Playing with Paul

Joseph W. Meeker

Joseph W. Meeker is a human ecologist with a Ph.D. in comparative literature, and master's and postdoctoral studies in wildlife ecology and comparative animal and human behaviour. He has been a ranger in the National Park Service. He produced and hosted the radio series "Minding the Earth" carried on many National Public Radio stations during the 1980s. He was formerly Senior Tutor in Humanities at Athabasca University. He has taught in several universities, and is currently an Emeritus Professor at the Graduate School of the Union Institute and University. He is especially interested in the evolution of human and animal play behaviour. His books include *Spheres of Life*, *The Comedy of Survival*, and *Minding the Earth*.

For nearly thirty years, Paul Shepard and I were in conversation. Sometimes there were pauses of several months at a time, but there was nothing especially awkward about these quiet times; when we resumed, the rhythm of our talk was restored. We talked about ideas, about projects we were working on, about books, about our families, about plants and animals and places, rocks and stars and oceans. Sometimes we disagreed, but we never really argued, perhaps because we both recognized that our areas of disagreement were topics where many interpretations could reasonably be held. Our conversations were a form of play we shared until Paul's death in 1996. We talked like friends, like colleagues, and occasionally like therapists or bartenders for one another.

Sometimes our conversations were recorded, as they were several times when I was producing "Minding the Earth," a radio series carried on National Public Radio. I want to use some of those on-the-record talks as well as some of our more private conversations to convey some sense of this man and his work, and how the two were blended.

One such chat took place at Paul's home in Palmer Canyon near Claremont, California. All during the conversation Paul's jungle fowl were crowing in the background.

Joe: It's been a crazy time for the past half-century. Relationships between humans and natural systems have become strained beyond bearing. What do you think is happening?

Paul: You speak of major changes in society, and when I begin to think about these I come back to thinking about major changes in me. The only way I can answer is through reflecting on my own sense of descending into the maelstrom step by step over a period of about thirty years. I started out as a young undergraduate at the end of the Second World War with an interest in birds. I thought birds were going to be my life work. I went to a university where I discovered that if you were deeply interested in birds, you should also take some interest in what birds eat, where they live, the water and soil they needed, and in what their human surroundings were like, what the people were doing to the birds. So, I got myself into the study of natural resources and the management of habitats in general. My birding suffered some. I had to go out a few less mornings, and had less contact with the birds I was interested in, but I felt the sacrifice was worth it.

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Then I went off to graduate school, and I had to take another step into the descent, because there I was told that these techniques were all very well, but that policy decisions were more important. Those were being made at a level above that of the ordinary professional who was working with soil and water. We had to know something about the history of society, and how legal systems work, and something about anthropology. So, I submitted my education to a broadening effect, even though that was not the kind of thing that was normally done for advanced academic work. As a result of that, I turned my dissertation finally into a book called *Man in the Landscape*, which was an attempt to look at the history of attitudes toward nature in the last couple of centuries of European and American history.

Joe: By that time, you'd been led beyond politics toward philosophy, hadn't you?

Paul: That's where it was leading me, and of course, I was seeing fewer and fewer birds. What was happening in a somewhat larger field was that we had become sensitized as a society to the notion that not only did we have to take political and economic and social account of influences on the natural world, but now we had to begin to think in terms of ethics and morality. We had to recognize that there were religious roots involved, and that there was a deeper and still broader background in the cultural history that went back many hundreds of

years. For this thinking, of course, we owe a great deal to people like Aldo Leopold, whose notion of a land ethic or an ecological conscience was important. So, I abandoned my studies of the history of esthetics and attitudes toward the landscape, and began to examine anthropological backgrounds. I thought, well, if we could be so fickle about our valuing of nature as to, in one era admire mountains, and in another era, think of them as something horrible, then obviously we were not going to solve our problems in any permanent way on that basis.

So I set myself the task of reading anthropology, seeking the advice of anthropologists and looking into the deep human past in the hope of finding there some kind of model or guide to the way in which we should behave in nature that didn't depend upon what legislatures did, or what the fashions of the times dictated about what was beautiful in nature, or what we wanted to preserve or not preserve. As a result of that, my book on hunting, *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*, emerged (and vanished quickly enough).

Joe: Not without having substantial impact.

Paul: That led me toward a strong sense that information itself was not going to make much difference. By 1970 we had not simply come alive at that moment, as it seemed to many young people, to the awareness of human relationships to nature. At least since the turn of the century, we had been very much aware that what we did in the natural world was going to determine the well-being of generations ahead of us. And yet, it's like the farmer in Missouri who said "I'm not farming now half as well as I know how." It wasn't a matter simply of getting information, or finding out about ourselves, or acquiring the data we need to know about who we are. It was not a matter, as I still somewhat naively supposed, of communicating ideas and information, but something else seemed to be at work. My own more recent sense of departure into a dark blackness in search of a kind of direction moves me away from the notion that education in its ordinary sense, producing an integrated understanding of complex systems through the sciences, social sciences, and humanities would itself bring us to a place where we were prepared to make those adjustments permitting us to live at peace on our planet.

Joe: Those "dark places" you're talking about are nooks and crannies and hidden spots in the human mind, aren't they?

Paul: They are. If we take the attitude that what we're doing on the planet is suicidal, self-destructive, in the long run; if, for reasons we don't understand, but intuit, the destruction of other species somehow will lead to the end of humanity; and if our course does not seem to be

altered by learning more about these ecological systems, then there must be other reasons beyond ordinary access to information. There must be motivations that lie hidden from ourselves. We must be moving along paths that perhaps we got onto some time ago, that require a different kind of exploration of the human psyche.

Joe: It's always interesting, and a little dangerous, to ask an author about the relationship between his own personal history and the culture to which he is responsible. Do you see a parallel between the development of Western consciousness in our time and your own personal history?

Paul: Yes, I think that's exactly it. What has happened to me is not that I have been making discoveries. This is good for one's own sense of humility. I think, Joe, what you have suggested is precisely true: what happens to one is that he is shaped by his time. Perhaps the most that an ordinary scholar like myself can hope is that he will be used as a kind of organ in which the society can think about itself. Or another sense in which life as a total organism is using people in some way to adjust itself. So I would say yes, it's a very good feeling that somehow I am being a part of a use to which human consciousness is putting itself. In that sense, I feel very much a part of the times. That's why the 1970s didn't really surprise me very much. The rise of ecological consciousness that seemed to take place with Earth Day of 1970 somehow seemed normal to me. It was the logical kind of thing to happen. And what we are involved with has to do with the psychological circumstances of our species or of our culture. It is not so much a discovery by persons as it is a growing consciousness on the part of society as a whole.

However much Paul thought of himself as a part of society as a whole, it is clear to me that his mind was far ahead of the collective consciousness. While society is now just barely able to admit that human behaviour is older than the six thousand years of civilization, Paul was exploring for decades the full implications of an ancient human past that stretches back hundreds of millennia. If our future depends to some extent upon our ability to understand the past, then Paul Shepard was one of the few pioneers who showed us the origins of our minds and souls. These do not begin with agriculture, cities, or religions, but with the hunting cultures.

Paul: I remain fairly strongly convinced by what anthropology is showing us about people living under hunting and gathering

circumstances. Our older vision of these people as unthinking, unfeeling savages who bashed and grunted their way through their lives, which were mainly hazardous escapes from dangerous creatures, was a fantasy and a fabrication of the past. As societies that anthropology is still studying, and as models of some inner creatures that we all are, these people still offer us guides as to what a rich and full human life might be like. My own thinking about the degree to which we have departed, the way we have lost, is in terms of the history of the past ten or twelve thousand years. If, in the hunting and gathering peoples that have been described to us from some twenty-odd tribes, we see the normal human life span being lived through a certain kind of at-homeness, a sense of being, of full identity, in a world which is good, a world in which one's personal life and society tend to affirm one another, then one of the ways to consider the distance from this that we now experience in a world in which we seem to be increasingly alien and isolated from one another and from things natural, would be in terms of episodes in our historical past that may throw some light on the normal developmental processes that bring the individual into a full maturity.

Joe: What's so good about the hunting life? What does it have that our lives lack today? What have we lost?

Paul: This is the point, of course, where the real anthropologist would be very hesitant, reluctant to make any kind of valuation that seems to compare one society against another one. Nonetheless, a good many of these studies of people still living as hunting and gathering tribes show them to have a profound respect for the nonhuman in their lives, a sense of well-being, a lack of the kinds of anxieties and fears that seem to trouble our own time, a rich feeling of continuity with the Earth and with the place in which they live, the limitation of desires for the accumulation of things, the sense of strong bonds of kinship which are ritualized and signified in various ways, especially in which the use of plant and animal life as food and gifts are concerned. Part of our own destructiveness about the natural world includes our misapprehensions about not only animals and plants, but about so-called savages. Even the anthropologists have not faced up to the revolution in thinking about our own past as "savages," and our own fellow human beings who are still living as hunters and gatherers. I think that there's a tremendous revolution that's going to dislodge assumptions about the nature of being human that is going to come out of that work.

Joe: It does seem that that hunting and gathering life is more deeply rooted in the history of our species. It must have a history of hundreds

of thousands of years, while post-domestication life extends only ten or twelve thousand years.

Paul: The earliest evidence of domestication of plants and animals is from about ten or twelve thousand years ago, as opposed to evidence of the existence of our species, *Homo sapiens*, for as much as three hundred thousand years. So there have been relatively few generations passed in which the whole of written and recorded history has taken place. Which means that the kind of creatures we are were adapted and evolved in a very different kind of life than we now find ourselves living. We are in a sense then each of us misfits in a world in which our own biology had not, so to speak, foreseen.

Joe: How can we get a feel for that way of life?

Paul: Think of a world in which the child goes through a long series of integrations in a tribal and clan life which culminate, sometime between his eleventh and sixteenth year, in a strenuous initiation into society that ultimately makes him feel deeply at home and deeply connected to the land he lives in. Let us suppose that this kind of experience, part of which is initiation, part of which are trials in the wilderness and quests for vision, includes a growth in his own feeling for the cosmos as a home, of the whole realm of wild and natural life as his own kin, as belonging to a complex and beautiful Earth, an infinite order in which he has a role and a place. This process of growth involves, for instance, coming to terms with an enormous diversity of wild things around him. Every day is an experience in wild things, in things whose purposes are their own, in things whose reason for being on the Earth, however linked to him and his society, is in part mysterious. Not things given as tools, or as ends in themselves, or something necessarily to be used, but things which may be part of a language about the meaning of the cosmos.

Now, imagine for a minute the difference between a life experienced as a young person in that kind of setting, and, let us say, the village of early farmers. Now the wild has been pushed back. If we think of this taking place in the semi-arid Near East, the wild land had been aggressively decimated and pushed back several miles from the village. The child is now growing up in a world where he is not only surrounded by an increased number of human beings, but of a very limited number of animals and plants, each of which has been so altered by human manipulation that it no longer has the appearance and spirit of wildness.

Joe: It doesn't seem "other" any more.

Paul: He has lost the opportunity to confront the “otherness” as a child and therefore to prepare a way of confronting otherness which he has to do in religious terms as he becomes an adult. We’re speaking of a normal developmental kind of thing which we all know from our own experience is one that tends to lead us, at about the time we’re twelve or thirteen years old, to think about the larger questions and to seek answers to those deeper questions of the purpose of life and of the origin of life which are going to be the meat and material of our own philosophy.

Joe: Are you saying that those questions that come up with adolescence are rooted in our evolutionary and biological history, as well as in our culture?

Paul: What the culture does is to provide its own peculiar and native answers to those questions, but the normal growth of curiosity about them is a species thing, something that all human beings share now on Earth, and probably have experienced at about that time in their lives for several hundred thousand years.

Joe: But then suddenly, with the invention of agriculture and the domestication of animals, that process gets modified. And part of that long expectation of what happens when a person grows up simply doesn’t happen any more.

Paul: One way of putting that would be that as a child, growing increasingly aware of the diversity of things, and with a natural interest in the names of creatures and what they do and their relationship to one another, the child is building a kind of model, a matrix, a structure. He or she is preparing a kind of system, a way of thinking about systems, that later on will provide a poetic language for talking about the cosmos as a whole. For example, the use of animals in myth as a way of talking about how things came to be, in the beginning, depends initially upon familiarization as a child with a variety of creatures and their interrelatedness. The child is building a huge body of facts, and of course the nine year old is a very factual person. He or she is interested in concrete things, in what things actually do, what they can see, what they are. There’s very little poetry in the life of an eight year old. But when he then, as a twelve year old becomes newly sensitive to the way in which language can mean more than one thing, he discovers that he has a whole body of entities in language that can be used to talk about reality at another level, at the level of the religious enterprise. Virtually all the ultimate things are talked about in words that have concrete metaphorical meanings that go back to childhood. In the village life, in which the child came to be increasingly impoverished of the richness of a natural world that had its own otherness about it, it became

increasingly difficult for him to shift to use that world in order to conceive of, to talk about, and to come to live in a cosmos that was beautifully rich in itself.

Joe: We've reserved a lot of admiration for that first domesticator of plants, that first tamer of animals, like the inventor of the wheel. We have been proud of those movements from a rudimentary stage of life into what we call a "civilized" way of life. What you're saying suggests that maybe we should feel a little embarrassed about those people because they removed us from a track that we need for our own mental and cultural health.

Paul: Imagine those villages of early planters and herders as they become increasingly large, into towns. They become increasingly specialized in the human occupations towns require, and increasingly organized into bureaucracies, eventually involving a priesthood, a military class, and so on. The subordination of the individual in such a society depends increasingly upon his willingness to submit to authority. He must be ready to work, slave, drudge in the fields. What I see in this is a direction that does not lead toward the sense of fully developed individuality, the sense of confidence and independence, or of a place in a cosmic order involving a great many other kinds of beings and their own ways. In these early village situations, what was desired, perhaps not consciously so, was a less mature individual, one who was ready, like a juvenile, to follow heroic leaders, and who was still influenced by what the Freudians have told us is an Oedipal fear of authoritarian figures. My suggestion is that circumstances in those times, and those village ways, did not seem to require that one come to terms with a vast, wild estate as a member of a larger system but that one come to terms increasingly with a human society which, in order to survive, required that the individual behave more and more like a child.

Joe: Then, incrementally over a long period of time, with minor losses of freedoms and powers, we began to reach a point where we disrupted some of the basic processes that we need as a species in order to fulfill ourselves.

Paul: We lost the normal developmental program of the individual, the ontogeny of the individual to move toward a confident adulthood or maturity in which a full sense of identity depends not only upon one's sense of difference from others, but on one's sense of connectedness and relatedness to them in distinct ways.

Joe: I think I see a picture of that village life and some of the things that were being gradually lost. There are later stages that look very different. In some of the more advanced stages, civilization seems to work pretty well. Religions are established, institutions are working well enough.

Aren't people often working in a fairly healthy way in some of those ancient, but advanced societies?

Paul: Yes, I think that over a period of several thousand years the great theocratic, temple cities of the Near East developed. Ur, for instance, the great Sumerian city, and the other Mesopotamian centers which developed the important theology of the feminine, the model of the great Mother Earth. They developed a strong body of ritual and ceremony which integrated the individual with the Earth and the soil. If this meant subordination to a strongly authoritarian and militaristic system of government, the sacrifice was necessary. Perhaps the later stages of maturing as an adult were given up in order that a large number of people living in great city-states could get along together and could sustain the productiveness of the Earth around them. Those great temple cities existed in relatively stable circumstances for a long period of time.

The next episode in this drama involves the awakening of what you might truly call Western consciousness. The Greeks and the Hebrew prophets were extremely skeptical of these temple cities and their reliance upon the spirits of the Earth and the spirits of place. The reaction came from the ancestors of our own modern de-mythologized thinking. They repudiated those religions which were dependent upon the spirits of the soil and of the Earth, with seasonal rituals of an integrated sense of a great wheel turning, on which mankind played simply a part in the cosmos, with the notion that there were creative spirits residing within the Earth, and that there was a great abundance of different gods and spirits. They created a shift toward the notion of a distant, arbitrary, invisible, unseen, vengeful god whose purposes were not known to mankind, and for whom loyalty depended upon condemnation of those great Earth rituals that had been developed by these agricultural city centers. What I am describing is the repudiation on the part of the more ascetic Hebrew fathers and Hebrew prophets of those processes of mythologizing and ritualizing in which humans integrated their lives with the Earth.

Paul and I have known ourselves to be heirs of a culture that has lost its mythic, tangible connections with natural processes. We were both ranger-naturalists in the National Park Service during the 1950s, and we saw how government agencies, created to protect natural settings, were in fact compromising and damaging them. We have traveled together, trying to restore ourselves through wonderful places, camping on Wyoming's Green River, birding in the Huachuca Mountains of Arizona, fishing in the Oregon Cascades and the Wrangells of Alaska,

and sailing up and down the Pacific Coast in Paul's boat. Conversations passed between us over scores of campfires and dinner tables, usually around the theme of how the human mind fits within the natural world, or fails to fit. We have felt the pain of our own estrangement from nature and from other human beings. Between us, we have been married five times, and we have talked long and hard to help one another through each of those transitions. We know how it feels to be a little crazy, and to connect those feelings with the human past and with the neurosis that surrounds us.

Paul: Joe, you've used the word neurosis. I didn't. Partly it's because I would like to avoid psycho-medical terminology. But it's there. Let me try to clarify what I see as the evolutionary direction of our species, and the ways in which it is related to human cultures. We know that, more than any other creature, we have a long developmental growth period, technically called neoteny. We remain childlike for as much as a third of the normal human lifespan. This is an extraordinary thing in nature. It's true to some extent of our primate cousins. It's true to some extent of all larger long-lived mammals. But it seems to be, among our kind, a high specialization. Incidentally, that contradicts the notion that we are the generalized animal. I think we are highly specialized creatures, and that this long, slow developmental ontogeny that we each go through is an evolutionary adaptation. It adapts us to cultural life. It makes it possible for the individual to be enculturated, to participate in a long sequence of enfoldments and enactments or activities in which he becomes increasingly identified with his particular people in his particular place on Earth. He learns of the great chains of connectedness that go out to all the beings in his environment.

Joe: So our culture is necessarily a part of our biology?

Paul: One might say that the biological adaptation that makes culture possible includes the use of language, but that in turn is tightly scheduled into the developmental program which is part of the gene blueprint of each individual. We each, therefore, go through an extremely complicated step-by-step process of development in which there is a readiness for input, from the culture, of different things at different times. I have emphasized, in talking about the earlier agricultural society, its loss of comprehensive otherness, non-humanness. And the ideal which the Hebrew fathers gave ultimately to Judaism and to Christianity, the idea of a distant god and the repudiation of those myths and rituals associated with the Earth; these are events which, previous to them, in hunting and gathering peoples, were normally locked into the developmental end events in adolescence

that brought the individual into a sense of belongingness and connectedness to the Earth on which he lives.

Joe: It may be that the environmental crisis of our time is also a mental crisis and a mental illness--that the two may be very closely interconnected.

Paul: I think it is possible to pursue this hypothesis. We can look at other epochs in the history of the West, and possibly identify events in the normal life cycle of the child and the young person which, for its own reasons, the culture of the time has found to its advantage to destroy, to obviate, to block in some way. One way to look at what it means to be civilized has to do with increasingly becoming infantile or childlike. An example from recent times is the notion of omnipotence over the whole of the natural creation. There is no lack in the last hundred years of paeans of praise for the idea that mankind will dominate the Earth. Of course that is derived from older statements within the Christian tradition, but the idea that it could in fact be done, that this Faustian impulse to control and dominate was indeed a reachable one, touches the fantasies that ordinary infants experience. It is the fantasy of absolute control over the world. Part of growing out of infancy is the discovery that one indeed is limited in power, and that one must come to terms with a world that cannot be wholly controlled. If the dream of dominating the natural world and absolutely controlling it is a dream that a society has, maybe it's to the advantage of that society to emphasize that infantile fantasy, and to do what it can, somehow empirically, in the education of the child to see that it keeps that dream of control.

Joe: It may be a short-term advantage to the society, but it's detrimental to the evolutionary development of the species.

Paul: As a naturalist, my own assumption is that the only way we reach an equilibrium with Earth as a home is to come to terms with our own limitations. You may call it humility, or just an understanding of our dependence on other creatures, and ultimately on the Earth's diversity, and on the importance of uniqueness of place, and on being surrounded by creatures other than ourselves. It means that we do not destroy, dominate, or use up the Earth, but that we limit the human use of the Earth. This was the end goal of those cultural processes to which neoteny lent itself: the slow development of the individual allowed the culture to develop something highly unique and local and to give the individual a sense of belonging which tied him in for life to a particular place and people. It opened us to vulnerabilities, to the possibility that a society, finding that more infantile behaviours (call them neurotic if you want) suited its purposes better, could devise, however unconsciously,

the means of delaying the developmental processes, locking the individual into those infantile behaviours. Something like this has been going on in civilization.

Paul and I shared the belief that knowledge of the past is also knowledge of the depths of the human spirit. Our talks led us to explore evolutionary and cultural history, but we have also explored our personal pasts together. We both have ancestors who came to North America from England early in the seventeenth century, so once Paul and I found ourselves examining the naval records at Greenwich, England, in search of traces of the ships they sailed on. For both of us, wild animals are important parts of our past and present, especially bears. We have looked for bears in California, Oregon, Alaska, and even in London, where we found the bear museum that stands on the site of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. And then, of course, there were Paul's jungle fowl . . .

Joe: Paul, while we've been sitting here I've been listening to your jungle fowl. There's an odd contrast in my mind. We're in Los Angeles County, one of the extreme developments in what we call civilization, ill or well, but certainly modern, and into this setting you have introduced the ancestor to the chicken. There are animals all around us here. Is that a part of maintaining your own mental health?

Paul: Yes, I think it is. They are the birds from which the chicken was domesticated. Here in this canyon, which is still a rather wild place, the foothills of the San Gabriel mountains, there are all kinds of things that would like to eat chickens, so that keeping ordinary chickens would be quite impossible unless you kept them in cages. I enjoy having these wild, exotic, pheasant-like birds around me, and they are fully able to take care of themselves, and to be free. These birds are descendants of a group brought from Burma in 1943, and whose relatives live in the San Diego Zoo. They do quite well here. They're beautiful and interesting, and they manage to keep my environs quite lively.

Joe: Animals play a role in the development of our mental health, and I presume that's as true for you as it is for a hunter-gatherer. Why is it important to have wild animals nearby?

Paul: As a young ecologist, in the middle of the century, I was convinced, as I think many people still are, that the importance of wild things around us was that they held together those chains of energy and

material flow that keep the whole biosystem, and therefore the whole environment, as a working entity, upon which we are dependent. In recent years, I've come increasingly to doubt that certain of those creatures, especially the larger and more mobile of them, are that essential to ecosystems. I realize this is somewhat heretical from an ecological point of view, but I've never seen a very good argument that the whooping crane in fact is essential to an ecosystem. Probably the same kind of thing could be said for many of the species of larger animals. If we are to articulate an argument for their continued existence, it has to be in some terms other than economic, other than the idea that they hold an ecosystem together. What the child is doing in his native curiosity about the names of plants and animals is building a means of thinking, using the animals as the objective units from which his own cognition develops. The fundamental idea of a category grows out of the name of a species. The first experience each child has with abstract thinking, is that abstraction which is the name of a kind of creature.

Joe: So taxonomy is at the root of consciousness?

Paul: Taxonomy is. That doesn't mean that it couldn't be done with other kinds of objects than creatures, but the creatures are a marvellous taxonomy because the very nature of the evolutionary system has been to clearly demark (at least in our daily experience) one kind of creature from another one and to allow us to perceive them as related groups. The notion of a hierarchic set of categories is implicit in the species system. Later on in childhood we are able to use the idea of interrelationships among the creatures as a kind of poetic or paradigmatic model of relatedness itself. In hunting and gathering peoples this means that the ecology around them--the interwoven network of different species--is a kind of example, a tangible presence around them, of the reality of an order of their own society that they carry in their heads. There is a way of thinking about orderly groupings of human beings in kinship systems which takes its cues from looking at and thinking about natural species systems.

Joe: A high degree of diversity, like that found in large, wild populations, is therefore a measure of the diversity of our own thought patterns.

Paul: That follows, because it probably was, somewhere back in the beginnings of things, the basis for the richness of our own thought patterns. D. H. Lawrence has said it much better than I can: "birds are ideas." I think he means by that that the awakening of human thinking had to do with watching animals. And it is not just in some distant past, but that same awakening takes place again in each one of us as we

grow, and it requires that kind of external concrete reality, that richness of wild things around us, in order to bring to life something that is already in our own heads, and is ready for ripening when we see and watch and try to understand those natural creatures.

Joe: Is there a chance for us, given the state that we're in, immature as we are, and made so by our culture, deprived of species diversity, influenced by a long history of limiting our perceptions, to recover some of the things that we have lost? Can we reach maturity, and rediscover our own full dimensions?

Paul: I sometimes think of myself as one of those "holocaust ecologists," who look upon the decline of the Earth in some despair. As a resource conservationist, and as a human ecologist, I continue to feel that way. On the other hand, the idea that indigenous to each of us, in the very private being of each of us, is a wise person waiting to be released, is a very hopeful thought for me. It tends to turn about that whole sense of six or seven thousand years of Western dualistic alienation which has led to the mechanizing of our world. That plunges me into a black despair; there's no way of unravelling or undoing that history. But the idea that each of us potentially carries within ourselves a person who is at home in the world, and who has possibilities for feeling a strong sense of dependence and relatedness in the world, I find to be highly refreshing, and a tremendous relief. In that sense I move toward a feeling that we can make enormous changes, but that they're not going to be made through changes in ideology, or policies, or programs. They're going to be made in the ways in which we rear our children. That's the only way to unlock the person hidden inside who is the gift from our evolutionary past.

Paul Shepard helped many people to unlock the past that was hidden within them. He always seemed to me to be proceeding in the spirit of play, enjoying the world, its creatures, and interesting ideas. I have played along with Paul for more than thirty years, and it has been hard to face the loss of a great playmate.