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FINDING YOUR SONG

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FINDING YOUR SONG

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Planet Earth is a *magnificent* mix of things that make “living” possible. Delicate mixtures of chemicals, minerals, gases, and waters bathe us. Earth is just the right distance from our sun to provide the energy, driving all the systems—necessary for life—as we know it. Some refer to this as the Great Balance of Life.

How well are these systems balanced, and what would it take for the Planet to lose its ability to create and sustain Life?

We are all aware of the long list of environmental problems facing us. We are also aware of the scientific uncertainties that make it difficult to predict the seriousness of these issues. We debate whether the problems merit the seemingly drastic measures often prescribed to correct them.

Despite the uncertainties surrounding many ecological issues, it is increasingly difficult to deny that many of the imbalances are indeed serious. Ozone loss is greater than anticipated. Immense acreage of rain forests and wetlands are converted to a “higher human use,” and we are losing farmland to erosion, salination, desertification, and urban growth at more than alarming rates. Over a billion people do not have access to safe water or adequate food, with 14 million children under the age of 5 dying each year. Yet our human population continues to grow.

Further, these problems are connected, often in ways that are difficult to predict. For example, atmospheric changes from the greenhouse effect may accelerate ozone depletion, and both global warming and ozone depletion may contribute to species loss. Steps to solve these problems are often connected, as well. Investing in energy conservation and solar energy to reduce greenhouse gas accumulation, for example, could ease our transition away from fossil fuels. Replacing chlorofluorocarbons will help reduce both ozone loss and greenhouse gas accumulation.

Environmental and economic problems are also connected. We have begun to realize the link between environmental degradation and worldwide economic disparities. A quarter of the world’s people are rich (including America’s middle class), enjoying the comforts provided by industrial technology. Another 20% are desperately poor, existing on the bare edge of survival. The Rich degrade the land by extracting, consuming and discarding at ever-increasing rates, contributing to the greenhouse gas accumulation,

ozone loss, and air and water pollution. The Poor degrade the land because they cannot afford sanitation and they cannot afford conservation. Their only choice is to farm or graze on land that can no longer support them, or move to sewage-filled urban slums.

So, what can we do? Do extension specialists have a responsibility to tackle these immense problems on an individual level? How about together? You and me—US!

We have been degrading the environment since long before the industrial revolution. Prehistoric humans used fire to alter ecosystems, and over-hunting may have contributed to the extinction of some animals. By the 17th century, western Europeans had logged most of their forests. Despite the extensive ecological disruption and human suffering caused by these events, they pale compared to environmental problems of today. Humans are rapidly increasing in number, each individual seeking to consume more and dramatically modifying their surroundings. Western culture has accelerated our tendency to consume and modify our environment like no other people of the past.

How does this happen?

1. We are **ANTHROPOCENTRIC**—we believe the planet exists merely for our use.
2. We revere **INDIVIDUALISM**—downplaying the relationships between humans and nature—**ME FIRST!**
3. We are **HIERARCHALISTIC**—ranking teams, towns, and people from high to low, good to bad, rich to poor. We separate ourselves by class, race, gender, income, culture. We place ourselves above all other creatures.

This is western culture of today. So, how do we save ourselves from destruction? Perhaps we should hear the “Wisdomkeepers;” share the humanity of Native American Spiritual Elders—the “old ones” who are fragile repositories of sacred ways and natural wisdom going back milleniums...yet relevant...especially today.

- *Everything I know I learned by listening and watching. Nowadays people learn out of books instead. Doctors study what man has learned. I pray to understand what man has forgotten.*

~ Vernon Cooper, Lumbee

- *These days people seek knowledge, not wisdom. Knowledge is of the past; wisdom is part of the future.*

~ Vernon Cooper, Lumbee

- *All things are equal, because all things are interrelated and an equal part of the whole; we are like drops of rain, which will one day return to the ocean, we are like candles lit by the fire of the Sun, forever a part of it.*

~ White Deer of Autumn

- *Unless you respect the earth, you destroy it. Unless you respect all of life, as much as your life, you become a destroyer.*

~ Oren Lyons, Onandaga

- *Think not forever of yourselves, O Chiefs, nor of your own generation. Think of continuing generations of our families, think of our grandchildren and of those yet unborn whose faces are coming from beneath the ground.*

~ Peacemaker...Iroquois Confederacy

- *The Seventh Generation
In our way of life, in our government, with every decision we make, we always keep in mind the Seventh Generation to come. It's our job to see that the people coming ahead, the generations still unborn, have a world no worse than ours—and hopefully better. When we walk upon Mother Earth we always plant our feet carefully because we know the faces of our future generations are looking up at us from beneath the ground. We never forget them.*

~ Oren Lyons, Onandaga

- *I, myself have no power. Real power comes only from the Creator. But, if you're asking about strength...the greatest strength is gentleness and wisdom.*

~ Leon Shenandoah, Iroquois

- *We Chiefs are the keepers of the Central Fire. This is not just a fire of logs and flames...it is the fire within one's heart...and mind.*

~ Louise Farmer, Onandaga

- *Everyone has a song. This is the gift of each of us, from the Great Spirit. That's how we know who we are. Our song tells us who we are.*

~ Charlie Knight, Ute

So what is *your* song? How will you present it?

The melody of my song came from a chorus of three mentors:

My mom, Lydia, instilled a love of nature in me. Mom spent hours leading me through the woods and fields—teaching me about the natural world surrounding our farmstead. At 98 years and two months, together we kayaked—revisiting nature. *Mom gave the wonder to my song.*

Woody, my high school wrestling coach taught me patience, the value of listening, the fine art of fishing, the enormous power of dedication, focus, and “finishative.” *Thanks Woody, for the quiet crescendo of my song.*

My third mentor, (though our lifetimes never met) *Chief Seattle, gave me the message of my song as a Nature Missionary.*

Chief Sealth (or Seattle), leader of the Suquamish tribe in the Washington Territory, delivered a prophetic speech in 1854, regarding the transfer of ancestral Native American lands to the federal government. The speech was delivered during a meeting with Isaac J. Stevens, first governor of Washington Territory. Chief Seattle and about 1,200 of his people gathered on the shore of Elliott Bay, which is now a part of Seattle. Speaking in his native tongue, it was translated by an Indian interpreter into Chinook Jargon. Several people have translated this spiritual message into English. Though many writers have embellished Chief Seattle's speech, his song continues, more than a century later, sending a strong environmental message:

The Great Chief in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land...

If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkles of the water, how can you buy them? Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experiences of my people.

So we will consider your offer to buy our land, but it will not be easy. For this land is sacred to us. This shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water, but is the blood of our ancestors.

This we know....Earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the Earth. This we know. All things are connected, like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected.

*Earth is our Mother ~ Sky is our Father.
The Eagle that soars
and the fish that swim
are our brothers and sisters.*

We know that the White Man does not understand our ways. One portion of the land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs.

There is no quiet place in the White Man's cities. No place to hear the leaves of spring or the rustle of insects' wings. The Indian prefers the soft sound of the wind darting over the face of the pond, the smell of the wind itself cleansed by a mid-day rain, or scented with a pinon pine. The air is precious to the Red Man. For all things share the same breath—the beasts, the trees, the man.

What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, men would die from great loneliness of spirit, for whatever happens to the beasts also happens to man.

The Whites, too, shall pass—perhaps sooner than the other tribes. Continue to contaminate your bed, and you will one night suffocate in your own waste. When the buffalo are all slaughtered, the wild horses all tamed, the secret corners of the forest heavy with the scent of many men, and the view of the ripe hills blotted by the talking wires, where is the thicket? Gone. Where is the eagle? Gone. And what is to say goodbye to the swift and the hunt, the end of living and the beginning of survival?

This we know. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the Earth...befalls the sons of Earth. Man didn't weave the web of life, he is merely a tiny part of a single strand of the web. Whatever he does to the web....he does to himself.

And we must teach our children of these things.

I thank my mentors....for helping me find my song.

Among us, others have found their song and shared through their giving, during the past Extension Wildlife and Fisheries Specialist Workshops:

December 1972 **Estes Park, Colorado**
Theme—Educational Challenges and Opportunities for Extension Wildlife and Fisheries Programs—John Schmidt, Colorado

April 1977 **San Antonio, Texas**
Theme—Extension Education and Legislation Needed to Expand Natural Resources Program Delivery—Milo Shult, Texas

November 1981 **Baton Rouge, Louisiana**
Theme—Strengthening Educational Program Delivery Through Improved Cooperation and Coordination with other Natural Resources Agencies and Organizations—Jim Fowler and Larry de la Bretonne, Louisiana State University

October 1984 **Madison, Wisconsin**
Theme—A Focus on Improving Private Land Stewardship Through Expanded Extension Natural Resource Programs—Bob Ruff and Scott Craven, University of Wisconsin

October 1987 **Jeckyll Island, Georgia**
Theme—Extension Natural Resource Programs in Changing Times—George Lewis and Jeff Jackson, University of Georgia

September 1990 **Monterey, California**
Theme—Future Directions for Cooperative Extension Wildlife, Fisheries and Aquaculture Programs—Lee Fitzhugh, University of California

May 1993 **Kansas City, Missouri**
Theme—Fish and Wildlife Stewardship for the 21st Century: Integrating People and Wildlife—Bob Pierce, University of Missouri; Jim Pease, Iowa State University; and Robert Henderson, Kansas State University

June 26-29 1996 **Bellingham, Washington**
Theme—Educational Challenges for the 21st Century—Dan Edge, Oregon State University and John Munn, Washington State University

*So, from this day forth, what will be your song?
Will you play a larger part in developing public policy?
~ restoring wetlands
~ preserving endangered species
~ promoting biodiversity*

Will your messages be directed to the easy to reach....easy to teach....or will it include the young, the seniors, and cultures difficult to reach, but so in need to hear your song?

And will you reach the high notes? Higher than you could possibly imagine when you were a kid....hunting, fishing, and dreaming, while watching the dragonflies along a stream?

Can you vision what your capacity to give and lead actually are? Is your song good enough?

Opportunity time ~ to be what you dream to be ~ is rapidly being taken up by what you are settling for.

Dan and I thank you for joining and participating in this Workshop, in our beautiful Pacific Northwest.

To be here, you have given. We thank you! Here's what we wish to give in return, if we could:

We'd give you the gift of childhood, so that you'd never lose your Sense of Wonder—of the natural world.

We'd give you a sense of humor—a life of laughter and joy.

We'd give you the gift of tears—to wash away sorrows—and celebrate joys.

We'd give you the gift of love and friendship, so you would never face life alone.

We'd give you the gift of solitude—time alone to explore your thoughts, to understand who you truly are, and to learn to love and accept yourself.

We'd give you the gift of dreams, for in dreams we find hope and challenge.

We'd give you the drum song of Cha-das-ska-dum Which-ta-lum.

But the most precious gift we'd bestow is the gift of passion. Not simply the passion between those we love, but the passion for life. The passion to feel deeply and act on those feelings. The passion to believe in yourself and others. The passion to stand up for what is right and just. The passion to watch the sunrise and feel its beauty and its promise; to walk along the beach and hear the pulse of the earth. The passion to live your life to the fullest, not to be a mere spectator.

All these gifts we would give to each of you—along with your unique heartsong—and we will sing with you.

Au Uh Kasa Kasa
(Good journey, safe return, with love)