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### Remembering the Ecological Wisdom of Ancient Forests & Elders

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#### I. Meeting Elders With the Young

One Spring, seven of us went to visit Merv Wilkinson in Wildwood Forest on Vancouver Island, B.C., Canada. I was joined by my wife, Tory Stevens, our three daughters, then ages 3, 6 and 8, and Mary and Orville Camp. For years both Orville and Merv have been independently learning sustainable forestry from the forest. They shared the award for Restoration Forester of the Year in 1990. They met at the conference where this honor was bestowed. Merv's Wildwood forest contains some of the oldest trees on Vancouver Island, trees which were already 1300 years old when Columbus landed on Turtle Island, the land that Europeans called America. Wildwood still looks like an ancient, natural forest, even though Merv has been taking wood out of it for fifty years.

Orville's forest was cut over by others in the late fifties. Before Orville's tenure, all trees of commercial value were removed, and only a few trees were left that were over ten inches in diameter. The main exceptions were trees, some quite large, judged too "decadent" to be harvested. The forest was not "clean" harvested and burned. Through natural selection ecoforestry, Orville has made

part of his living from the forest, while it regains old-growth stature. Both Orville and Merv live in forests managed by Nature. These forests provide a sharp contrast to the clearcuts and plantations in their surrounding areas. Both have a diversity of species and ages, and a wild feel to them. Both forests have standing elders.

I thought about natural forests and how they differ from tree plantations, as we drove to Merv's. When I came to the North West in the early Forties, there were large, unbroken expanses of ancient natural forests from Alaska to California. We moved to the Olympic Peninsula of Washington in the late Forties. The Peninsula was then covered with old-growth forests, and at their core lay a million acres of wilderness National Park. I went to school in Shelton, Washington, which was then almost entirely dependent on the forests.

In school we learned about sustained yield, and how the forests of the Shelton area were being managed on a 120 year sustained yield rotation. Over the years since then, the length of the cycle kept compressing as foresters made ever more optimistic estimates about how the "scientific management" of forests could more rapidly increase quantity and quality of timber and wood fiber. This approach was designed to sustain production, not natural forests and human communities.

Industrial forestry is based on the same approach as conventional agriculture, which relies on heavy machinery, fossil fuels and petrochemicals. In industrial agriculture and forestry humans strive to control and manage all factors which impede or enhance farm and forest productivity. Production must keep up with demand, and the faith is that this will happen efficiently in a competitive, monetarized, market economy. In only four and one half decades since my school days in Shelton, timber based communities of the North West, from Northern California to Southern Alaska, have either all but disappeared or have suffered a steep decline in prospects. Most of the ancient forests on private land have been clearcut, and most of the forests on public land have been too.

The standard industrial practice is to clearcut large areas. Everything is cut down, even small stuff. The cut areas are then given a "treatment" with machines and the woody material is piled for burning. The whole clearcut is set on fire during the "burning season". If funds are available, the clearcut is planted, usually with one species of tree, although recently the practice has begun to shift toward planting more mixed "stands". The emphasis has always been on controlling nature. Visiting an area once covered with natural forest, which has been given this treatment, can be deeply troubling to someone not desensitized by involvement in the process.

As we drove to visit Merv, I recalled some of my own feelings when I revisited forest places I had known as a child and young adult which were now gone, even though the locations remain. These places were not just physical locations on the grid of some map, but four-dimensionally complex networks of plant and animal communities, with ancient historical continuities like traditions. I recently went to a lake I had often visited as a teen. The clearcuts, burned over land, roads and tree plantations have totally altered the place; although the lake is still there. I felt this as a deep personal and spiritual loss, which in part made itself felt as physical pain.

We pulled into Merv's parking area, and drove out of the direct, bright sun, into the leaf and needle filtered green light of Wildwood. There was a deep silence, when the engine noise died. Through the open windows of the car we could hear the wind moving through the canopy. This lush sound soothed our highway stress. Once out of the car, the children sprang into action. They ran in every direction, trying to touch and smell everything, each making major announced discoveries every ten seconds. Here they were touching a world of great biological diversity which was very old.

We walked on a dirt road down hill to a flat bordered by a small lake. Merv's house is in an open area, not far from the edge of the lake. It is made of local, natural materials. It looks like it grew out of the place it occupies. The children were completely captivated by it. To them it looked like a fairytale house, and Merv a grandfather forest spirit. Inside the house they became involved in an improvised fairytale game.

When we first arrived, Merv was meeting with a class of 6th graders whose teacher had brought them to see Wildwood Forest. Merv has published a book called *Wildwood: A Forest with a Future*, which recounts what living in the forest has taught him. Merv and Wildwood have been featured on numerous media programs and conferences, and he has become something of a celebrity in Canada.

Orville Camp also has published a book about his experience and knowledge of sustainable forestry, which he calls natural selection ecoforestry. His *Forest Farmer's Handbook* explains its theory and practice.

Although Merv and Orville are very articulate, neither of them can fully explain all that goes on day to day in the practice of their forest harmonizing "arts". Both have lived in their forests daily for a long time. They say that the more time one spends in a forest throughout and over the years, the more one sees, learns, and realizes how little we know about the complex forest

communities, for which trees provide the major structured space. Forests are rich in diversity and quantity of places. In some cases they extend habitat possibilities to almost 300 feet above ground over whole watersheds and beyond. Bare ground has only surface area, but natural forests are places of complex, structural networks above and below ground. There is as much going on below ground as above.

We chatted with Merv, and looked at pictures and maps of Wildwood, then we took a walk through the forest. While in the house, the children had played quietly in Merv's child-scaled loft, with its low ceiling and down-sized furniture. When we went outside they resumed their high energy movements and noise. As we walked through the meadow that surrounds Merv's house, they boisterously ran about. When we entered the forest, they quieted down some.

Merv told us of a forest fire which swept Vancouver Island following a long drought about a thousand years ago. It was a wind-driven crown fire which killed all but the tallest trees. Pockets of these older trees have survived. The eldest of the trees which live in Wildwood is a giant Douglas fir over 1800 years old. As we approached this ancient giant, the children became very quiet. They walked up to the base of the tree and looked up its trunk, awed by this elder's majesty. A profound silence came over us for a brief moment, as we shared nature's timelessness. This was one of those brief magical moments, which are, alas, too rare in daily city life, mostly surrounded as we are by a technosphere of ephemeral human artifacts: clocks, TVs, cars, streets, cement sidewalks, radios, video games, etc.

In ancient forests we stand in the shadows and light, the sounds and odors of living communities whose place specific histories have a continuity stretching back hundreds and thousands of generations. Our eldest was amazed to learn that this tree had begun its life not long after the birth of the Baby Jesus. The two events, the traditional date for the birth of Christ, and the estimated birth of the tree, are within a century or so of one another. Our daughter had earlier spent some time comprehending how long ago Jesus was born. This gave her a place into which to fit this new information about the tree's age. We make sense of new information by putting it into an appropriate place in our own enlarging stories, which increase in richness as a result. Standing beside such an ancient tree gives us perspective on the fleeting nature of most of our concerns, and the longevity of human civilizations.

## **li. Modern Industrial Society, Community and Place**

Modern industrial society, with its waves of technological revolution, is between three to four hundred years old, even though it has Western Civilization's ancient roots. It is a society which has tried consciously to break with its ancestral traditions, so as to control nature and humans through science and technology. Mass education and mass production were made for each other. The idea that humans can master and control nature for human ends is fairly unique. That we can intentionally design culture to be subservient to technological and economic development is almost a singularity. So far as I know, no other cultures have embarked upon this twin control program. Today, modern industrial techniques and models have been applied to almost everything, and this has produced many good things, but it has also had large spiritual and environmental costs. It has selectively eliminated important values and rich sources of meaning. It has destroyed large areas of the beautiful and bountiful natural world.

Reconnecting with nature's primal spontaneity through the children and the power of the ancient elder, I could see what an enormous moral and spiritual blunder it is to cut down such trees. Here I use the word "blunder," rather than "sin" or "evil," because it is hard to imagine anyone cutting or causing to have cut down such beings, if they understood all that they are.

As we walked in Wildwood forest, I reflected on the contrast to walking through clearcuts scarified by machinery and burned. To look at such devastation is overwhelming. Its presence is an indication of ignorance and that all is not spiritually and morally well with us. For thousands of years and generations, countless beings had together created a complex habitat supporting a diversity of life forms. These habitats are growing and changing through evolution. As natural forests increase their genetic base and four dimensional depth, the variety and number of places increase; new possibilities arise. So, they are home to a myriad diversity of flourishing beings. The temperate and tropical forests are among the most complex and biologically diverse areas on the Earth. Industrial forestry destroys almost all of this complexity and genetic diversity. When the forest is completely gone, only a two dimensional plain remains, the third dimension of depth and height is lost as is the fourth dimension of time - -as accumulated learning. This learning, which took centuries to accumulate and is unique to that one location on Earth, is gone forever. The increasing diversity and richness of the natural forest is swept away by "harvesting" practices based on the time scale of quarterly reports.

When we try to list the diversity of values we find in natural forest communities, we find that the list grows as our understanding deepens. Their multiplicity of values can be approached under the following, not exhaustive list, of categories: Life support, natural history, species diversity, spiritual,

moral, aesthetic, scientific, productive, utilitarian, recreational, personal and community growth, and nonhuman intrinsic values of the forest as a whole. Each of these categories has a large number of values falling under it, and we discover new ones as time goes by.

Let us consider just some of the values in the productive category. For this purpose let us compare the forest ecosystem to a factory. Imagine a town which has some good, efficient, clean, production facilities, which supply goods vitally needed by humans. Some wags come to town, who manage to convince people that they would be better off, if they would dismantle the factories and sell them to outsiders. So the towns people do this, and while dismantling the plants they are busy and making money. However, after the last part is shipped, they realize they have nothing left to do. They no longer can earn a living from their past employment. Only those who have lost their temporal perspective, could be convinced that such short term gains are better than the long term ones that would have been provided by the lost production facilities.

It is difficult to grasp the long time span and complexity of natural forest communities, unless one spends time living in them over a 40 to 50 year period. After several decades we should appreciate how little we know. What we *do* know is humbling. Who would ever have dreamed even a few years ago that the largest single living being, and oldest discovered so far, is not a tree, but a mycelium, living in symbiosis with tree and other plant roots? Who could have said how interdependent trees and fungi are? Or, who would have thought that in a natural forest trees exchange information which helps them to control bug infestations? And what of the role of forests in creating atmosphere, modifying climate, and controlling floods? The Earth's forests are integral to the vast dance of life.

Forests can teach us only if we are prepared to learn by being open to them. I will explain what is meant by openness here. Once I stopped on a ridge in a forest of tall trees, which were moving together with the wind. I was alone at the time because I had moved far ahead of my party. I just stopped walking and stood quietly in the forest, and before I knew it I was swaying with the trees in the wind. I became one with the forest and had a clear sense of connectedness with its will. This just happened spontaneously. Some traditions have spiritual disciplines I call tree meditations. Through them one can become aware of the worlds within worlds in which the forests dwell. A forest is not just a stand of isolated trees. Although each tree is an individual, it is also part of the forest. Its forest in turn is part of larger biogeoclimatic processes which are evolving through time. As biodiversity and richness increase, value and meaning increase. In current theories, evolution moves toward complexity, differentiation, and symbiosis, toward greater richness and diversity. Each new

form of life and new way of dwelling in these natural processes adds to the sum total of values realized. Moreover, these create new possibilities which build on accumulated ecological wisdom (ecosophy). In contrast, the practice of modern industrial forestry, based on the petrochemical agricultural model, does just the opposite. It reduces all values to the lowest common denominator, monetary considerations. It reduces the possibilities for meaning. It undermines significant relationships and community.

### **lii. Modern Industrial Society, Community and Knowledge**

Natural forests, and sustainable, symbiotic human communities, greatly increase the range for meaningful and valuable relationships. By being members of a community we are able to create and maintain relationships which realize more values and greater meaning than we each can realize alone. When we explore the ecology of the human self and natural communities, we realize how interdependent we are. The industrial model assumes that each part can be isolated and defined independent of everything else. But no individual, whether word or person, can be isolated in this way and realize meaning and value, let alone survive. All that each of us is, is shared by everything else that is. If each of us personally had to destroy the individual beings wiped out by the destruction of forest communities, we would refuse to do it. Few of us would kill birds and animals, or pull up wildflowers. On the contrary, most of us will go to great lengths to rescue a trapped kitten or duck.

Inaction over forest destruction must be partly a result of the success of public relations and other efforts to conceal the reality and consequences of destructive practices, which we tacitly support, even if only indirectly through various forms of economic activity. Turning ancient giant elders into chips and destroying forest communities so as to manufacture paper tissue is crazy. There are alternative sources of fiber which do not involve such destruction. There are alternative forestry practices which do not interfere with natural forests' evolutionary processes, which leave forest communities intact. There are practices which can help to restore natural forests. There are thoughtful, preserving ways to live. Certainly, if fully informed, we each would morally and spiritually support only practices which are nonviolent and let other beings be, which respect and honor them, and which treasure and add to richness and diversity. And as we become informed, what level of commitment to saving and serving natural forests are we willing to make? With respect to jobs, saving natural forests will create more work than leveling them does.

The division of labor and specialization of knowledge which characterize

industrial society, reflects the reality of top-down hierarchy biased in favor of patriarchy. Knowledge is pursued for profit and power. Under these circumstances it becomes a commodity. Knowledge of the world as a whole is thought impossible, and rewards are given to those with specialized expertise. Knowledge in industrial society is fragmented and placeless. Without larger vision of the whole it can be trivial or even dangerous. Thus, such knowledge is out of touch with an older wisdom. Without comprehensive understanding we tend to lead isolated lives as producers and consumers. Everything is subjugated to production and consumption. The values that clearly count in modern industrial society are those related to production, consumption, and profit. These are taken for granted, along with a narrow economic definition of progress - more is better. We each resent being treated as objects or units of production, but this is what the industrial model requires. This process of separation, isolation and reduced capacity for perception of values, meanings, and a larger wisdom brings with it the terrible emptiness of being alienated from ourselves, each other and Nature.

This loss of meaning, through loss of membership in the larger natural order that is committed to place, cannot be overcome by consuming and producing more things. This brings temporary relief, perhaps, and so can the pursuit of less tangible rewards such as fame, fortune and power. But few can attain these, and so personal pleasure and comfort become primary aims, for which industrial society produces an array of goodies which are only substitutes for authentic connection and spontaneous experience of nature. In this manufactured "virtual reality," experience becomes an artifact, the programmed production of media and functionaries. We hunger to leave the technosphere and enter the real world of living time, to escape the unit based clock measured time.

The ancient forests are witnesses to the folly of the short term, narrow pursuits, which grip us with addictive power, but are only palliatives. They do not go down to the deep roots of this modern condition. When we sit in the forests, with the ancient elders bearing witness to centuries, we can be taken out of this narrow, functional mind. We have for a moment escaped the mind control of the industrial ego which applies its forms of manipulation to everything in order to avoid facing its own shadow, that in itself which it denies, but which nonetheless defines it. Perception of the forest becomes more complete the more the reigns of control are released, and the more the forest is respected for itself. The less we attempt to control it and our own experience, the more we will learn from the revelations of the natural forests.

#### **Iv. Meaning, Tradition and Primal Stories**



This narrative has been partly woven around certain illuminating, spontaneous, experiences of natural forests. I have tried to shed light on some of their moral and spiritual dimensions by describing these encounters. Listening, watching, smelling, tasting, feeling, . . . these suggest an activity, examining, but here we refer to an active opening or receptiveness to the natural world. As mentioned, some traditions have specific ceremonial rituals and journeyings which facilitate opening to spontaneous experiences of nature. In some primal cultures this is approached through shamanic journeying and vision quests. My formal experience with shamanic practices was through a workshop on the spirits of nature conducted by Michael Harner, and from an earlier workshop conducted by one of his associates. Informally, I have spontaneously entered the shamanic dimension many times during wilderness wandering. Shamanic journeying helps to facilitate spontaneous encounters with the spiritual powers of nature. This is underscored by warnings against trying to capture a guardian spirit. A guardian spirit must choose to show itself to you three times before you can ask its help, for if it has shown itself three times, it has most likely chosen to help you. If you try to grab or control it, or flaunt it, you will lose it. You might even make it an enemy.

Harner originated the term "core shamanism" to refer to the spiritual practices and main philosophical elements shared by different shamanic traditions worldwide. From first-hand study and participation in different traditions, Harner has distilled the essential, cross-cultural elements of core shamanism. These seem to arise from our basic humanity and its deep interconnections with the natural world. The paleolithic shaman is deep within the consciousness of each of us. Forests show us this, and they also show us that they too are in the larger conscious stream of nature. In this stream there are many manifestations of grandparents and elders.

Core shamanism makes use of rituals and techniques within a ceremonial setting, to facilitate access to nature's wisdom and to call for help from the creator. In the spirits of nature workshop, we had a ceremony which involved the trees that live in the area where the workshop was held. We were sent outside each to find our own tree. We were to sit with this tree until the drum called us to return to the ceremonial circle. I followed these instructions and spent some time leaning on my tree dissolving into the trunk. To sense such subtle dissolution of boundaries requires a spontaneous dropping of the warrior guard; I call it attentive openness. When the drums called, we each returned to the ceremonial building. Once in the semi-darkened room, we were told to stand around in the room and be the tree we had each just been with. We were spaced around the room the way a forest is, naturally, not in an evenly spaced grid pattern. The "trees" were many ages and kinds.

Harner and two other drummers begin to drum and move throughout the "forest" we had created. The drums, with their deep, resonant, hypnotic rhythm, put us into a light trance- state. The sounds of the drums changed in quality as they moved around the room; sometimes they sounded like the wind; sometimes like a river. We trees became a forest, and swayed together in the wind. Birds sang in the canopies, flowers bloomed, flies buzzed, spiders spun, the drums became thunder and rain. It was blissful being part of this forest community.

Without warning Michael shouted, "Here come the chainsaws." The drums increased in tempo and loudness. They no longer sounded comforting and friendly. They became threatening and sinister. A wave of fear and horror swept through us as tree after tree was cut down. The trees cried out in pain as they were cut. The remaining trees trembled in fear, while grieving the death of the others. In the natural forests being clearcut, the animals which can, flee, but most of them are unable to return, for their homes, communities, and places are gone.

I cannot speak for others who participated in this ceremony. For me this participation was a deeply moving enactment of the tragedy going on in the world's forests. This is a tragedy for all beings, but especially for indigenous people and the creatures who live in these natural forests. Most of them are destroyed when the forest is, and with them we lose a heritage and connection with our whole past on this Earth. This is a wisdom gained through living deeply intertwined with place specific knowledge, which also shows a larger global wisdom.

When the drums stopped, the silence was broken only by the sobbing trees. Together we had helped one another to realize the sin of destroying whole forests. I use the word "sin" here in the spiritual rather than religious sense. The spiritual transcends religion. Ideally, religions are cultural creations aimed at facilitating the holy life, a life of spiritual purification and harmony with creation. To fully appreciate this realization and remind ourselves of it is very difficult. We must realize our place spiritually. This comes through humility and nonviolence, through realizing our own ignorance. We then can only wonder at the mystery of the natural forests. How can we tell all of the stories of the many lives that the forest communities encompass, with their diverse and rich ways of life, and with their larger webs of connections to the world as a whole? We need all of the arts, skills and imagination at our disposal to portray and celebrate these.

Richness in narrative details can help us come down from abstract concepts to

the concrete reality of the primal natural forests. These forests are neither artificial plantations nor abstractions such as quarterly reports and credit. We must leave cleverly manufactured human abstractions so as to return to our whole, original, spontaneous experience, in which there are no fixed boundaries between self and others. When we do this we will realize that what happens to the natural forests and all their beings, happens to us too. This helps us to understand our birthrights and responsibilities. Our ecological Self is intertwined with all beings. We can explore this ecological Self by means of expanding our personal commitment. In doing so we enlarge our capacity for sharing and caring. We can then explore our many interconnections, if only through breathing. Breathing meditation can disclose the interdependent ecological Self. It is a difficult but simple practice open to all of us. (Try harmonizing your breath with another person, and then with the forest.)

We each have the capacity to perceive moral and spiritual realities, to be fully receptive to the world, to be open to learning from each being. Whether we do so depends on our willingness to remove the barriers we ourselves continually reinforce. These are both cultural and personal. However, at our core we are all still natural beings, for what is visible is only the culturally self-conscious tip of the deeper ecological consciousness. The deep ecological Self speaks or resurfaces, stands out and comes forth, during moments of spontaneous experience, such as we have tried to portray here through our stories. These stories work only if they help us to remember who and what we are.

## **V. Summits And Elders**

We had climbed up from the lower flat where Merv's house sits, and were on a forested slope near the entrance to his driveway. Climbing up the hill, Merv and Orville were walking side by side, talking about forests and good and bad forestry practices. The children and Merv's dog were playing some game known only to them. Tory and Mary were taking pictures. I was contemplating the way Merv's road wound through the forest like a deer trail.

The canopy of the forest hid the sky from the road, except for a limb-laced patch of blue here and there. I climbed up onto a mossy boulder above the road. While on it, I looked up through the trees to the top of the forest canopy. I recalled recent research in temperate and tropical ancient forest canopies which had astounded botanists and zoologists alike: An incredible diversity and biomass of living beings, most of which had not been classified. I thought about the biomass underground, and that science has only classified about 10% of those beings.

From my perch I sensed being in the midst of millions of living beings, most of whom I could not, and probably would not ever see with my own eyes. I had thought I knew something about natural forests from a lifetime of first-hand experience, enlarged by reading much scientific and other literature about them. But there a forest glowed in concrete clarity and profound mystery.

In the Gaia hypothesis the central image is that the Earth is a living being made up of myriads of other living beings. There is life, within life, within life, within life. . . Each of us is a community of living beings, and each community of living beings is part of a larger community of communities. A community is the smallest ecological whole, or perhaps we should say the smallest comprehensible whole about which we can tell multi- generational stories. It holds all of the other individual stories together through time, generation after generation. Language (or communication) is interdependent with community. With community (and communication) vast new possibilities open up. Community is not just a physical location, but space enlarged by shared moral, spiritual and other relationships and activities. It makes communion possible. The root of the words "community" and "communion" are the same.

In human communities meaningful stories are held together by the elders; they are the continuity the group has with its past, just as children are with the future. They define a community's relationships to time. The community's wisdom is fully embodied in them. Even though an elder might be silent, their mere presence speaks eloquently of the community's traditions. The accumulated wisdom of the elders prepares it for facing extreme conditions, and weathering storms and trials. How the elders are treated reveals the community's spiritual condition.

At Harner's Spirits of Nature Workshop, following the tree ceremony, there was a general sense of having been part of a forest community. After the ceremonial journey, some spoke as young trees who were not cut down. They were glad to continue, they said, but they felt deep sorrow at the loss of most of the elders. As the elders dwindled, they felt more and more cut off from a full community. Their connections were being severed, and so they felt less secure and more vulnerable.

In human life we seek values and meaning. We judge ourselves in the values by which we try to live. We all want meaningful lives rich with a diversity of values. Values can be defined in many different ways. However we define them, we know that there is a range of acceptable, nonviolent values, by which we can live meaningful lives in harmony with other beings. This wide range of values consistent with sustainability allows for great diversity in human cultures. This diversity increases richness, whereas too much cultural

homogenization is impoverishing; everything becomes general and there are too few centers. This is central to the wisdom of bioregionalism - culture should reflect the unique attributes of dwelling over generations in specific places and regions which make sense as ecological wholes.

In a human community shared commitment to a core of values is necessary, if we are to live together. For example, what or whoever we share our lives with, and what nurtures or is nurtured by us, cares for, supports, and depends upon us, etc., requires our respect and care. In spiritual traditions from Buddhist to primal, becoming aware of our life-worlds, and of the networks of communities to which we belong, is crucial to maturing out of a narrow self-focused preoccupation. In all of these traditions the central, core values are those which make community possible. Maturity is measured by how far one moves from an egocentric focus to commitment to the integrity of the community, and to realizing the larger Self through it. Here is a story from Native American traditions which helps bring this out.

An elder and a young warrior journeyed together to the high alpine world. While camped there, the elder asked the warrior late one afternoon, if he yet knew who he was. The warrior replied that he did. He said, "I am Diving Hawk, head of the bear clan, and I have counted many coup against my enemies." The elder sat quietly throughout the warrior's brief speech. After a long silence, he stood up and gestured to the meadows and flowers, and then to the forests and mountains, as he said, "Until you realize that you are the flowers and meadows, and the forests and mountains around us, you will not know who you are."

I think that the Taoist Monks who practice tree meditation are carrying on this ancient primal wisdom by sitting in meditation with the trees until boundaries drop away. I think that in the core shamanic circle-forest-ceremony the Elders' wisdom also continues to express itself in embodied form through these primal spiritual practices.

Let us make our commitments equal to the task of saving and caring for the elders which remain. Let us learn from them. The eldest in the stream of life are found in the ancient forests. To destroy their integrity would be comparable to removing all elders from a European country, along with all of the old buildings, works of art and other links to the past. It would destroy the communities.

Our practices must harmonize with the way of the natural forests. Those elders which remain will speak to us, if we listen with an open heart. Practices which

exemplify sustainability will lead to sustainable human communities, which depend upon self-sustaining natural forest ecosystems. These are all interdependent. Current practices, which are little different from those of the early part of the century, destroy first the forest communities, and then the human communities whose economies and traditions depend on the forests. We have seen this happen over and over to communities based on exploiting resources on the industrial model. For Modern industrial culture there is no value in tradition; its values revere no place; there is no commitment to the integrity of communities, or to forests, lands and waters. The natural forest is seen as a crop nature planted which when ripe should be harvested, and then replaced by a human planted tree farm. Those who manage and work in these "forests" have jobs and careers, not a lifetime of good work, with a long, noble tradition rich in meaning and value. Modern industrial practices are not grounded in the wisdom of elders; the young find them meaningless, and only want to move away in search of an honorable way of life.

The barking of Merv's dog broke the reflective forest spell. I climbed down from the boulder to join the others for the return trip to Victoria. We said goodbye to Merv, and drove back down the country road to the main highway. On the highway we passed through recent strip developments of tasteless architecture, with no tradition, ephemeral even in human terms. They were built to last a mortgage, and probably will be torn down by the time the investment has been written off. I saw no elders about. One of our daughters said something about Granny and Grandpa, as the wheels of the silver and black van whirred over the blacktop under a darkening sky.

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