The Wildness Within by Kenneth Brower (HayDay - 2012)

PETER HAYES

PETER HAYES, the executive director of the Nautilus Institute, divides his time between the organization's offices in San Francisco, Australia, and South Korea, with forays into North Korea, as well. Nautilus, which Hayes cofounded, is a think tank concerned with problems of sustainability, security, and nuclear proliferation. His book *Pacific Powderkeg: American Nuclear Dilemmas in Korea*, published by Free Press in New York and Han-ul Press in Seoul, suggests one of his principal preoccupations. In Australia, Hayes is a professor of international relations at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. In California, where he spends about half the year, he is an activist and keeps a small adjunct office on the ground floor of his Berkeley home.

Hayes is a big man, six feet five, and his home office does not leave him a lot of room for maneuvering. A tall steel weight machine occupies much of one wall. A disk, L3, has gone out in his back, and the weight machine is to stave off surgery by strengthening his core. He works it every day. The day of the interview, I squeezed by a table piled with books and found a seat. On a narrow ledge running around the wall, a surprising number of digital and analogue devices were recharging. The metronome of the family dryer clunked softly from the next room. Given the size of the room, there was no need for either of us to leave his seat for Hayes to give me a tour of his walls.

"That is a scroll from South Korea," he said. "I can't remember the exact translation, but it's words to the effect of, 'Moon, sun, and calm repose.' It's a gift from a Korean colleague. It's beautiful." A satellite photo on the wall showed the stretch of the Victoria coast where his family had their farm. Next was a pair of portraits. "That's my father. And that's my mother. She's still alive. She's out on the farm. They were both agricultural scientists."

"Which one is responsible for your size?"

"He was six-two. Mary's five-eleven. So I guess I get it from both of them. It's genetic, and also from drinking milk growing up on the dairy farm. Actually, my parents always said my height was from walking in bare feet in the chicken shit, collecting eggs. It's dry, the chicken manure, but it's very high in fertilizer."

He pointed to a small stand-up desk.

"That was another thing I picked up from Dave. Standing writing. This little table is brilliant. I spend about half my day standing up writing. He always stood up typing, and I was struck by that."

Hayes picked up a nicely shaped rock and showed it to me.

"You remember Dave used to collect rocks? I used to bring him bloody rocks all the time. I don't know what he did with them."

What Dave did with them, I explained, is fill up his house. My father's rock collection covered every horizontal surface in the place. It drove my mother crazy. Rocks from Glen Canyon, Sierra Nevada rocks with yellow lichen, Canadian rocks with orange lichen, limestone rocks with fossils, river-rounded stones, rocks from all over the world. Hayes laughed.

"I remember bringing Dave a piece of cinder from the top of Mount Stromboli," he said. "Which is an active volcano. Carried that bloody thing all the way around the planet for a couple of years before I gave it to him. And I gave him a couple of pieces of black basalt like this one here, which I lugged off the hill above the beach where I grew up in Australia. Small offerings."

MY CONNECTION WITH Friends of the Earth began in England, in London, in late '72. I went there to organize protests against the French nuclear-weapons tests in the South Pacific, on Mururoa Atoll. In London I met Richard Sandbrook and Tom Burke, who were cofounders of the English branch of Friends of the Earth. Then I went on to Paris, which was obviously ground center for demonstrations against the French tests. I was introduced to Les Amis de la Terre, the French branch of Friends of the Earth, and I met Brice Lalonde, the founder. Brice essentially took me under his wing. He became political mentor for the rest of my life. I learned so much from Brice about politics and organizational strategy. He had been president of the National Student Union of France at the Sorbonne in the 1968 student revolt against de Gaulle. He was a man who knew how to organize. He was a big friend and ally of Dave's. Later he ran for president of France on the Green ticket and eventually he became environment minister of France.

I was living with Brice in an attic apartment that he controlled. I stayed for quite a long time, working with Les Amis de la Terre, organizing protest walks from London to Paris, and the occupation of Notre Dame, and various sorts of fairly spectacular activities. At that point, the union in Australia and the South Pacific had cut off all telecommunications and trade ties with France, so these protests were not just a sort of side issue. They actually had salience. In Paris the government was paying attention, no doubt of that. The National Assembly reps from Polynesia were involved. Some wonderful people. We sent a group to Mururoa: Jean Toulat, who was a French Catholic priest. Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, the author of *Le Défi Américain*, "The American Challenge," and editor and owner of *L'Express* political magazine—a very rich man. General de Bollardière, who was the actual on-the-ground Resistance leader during World War II. And Brice. Brice came up with this strategy of boarding ships at sea. This group went out to Mururoa and were arrested by the French Navy.

I kept very much in the background, doing a lot of very silent organizing work. And then someone called my parents in Australia

and said that I was going to be killed if I stayed in Paris. At that point, we'd gotten through the summer. So I left. This threat, they weren't just screwing around. I consulted with knowledgeable people who said it was time to go, so I did. So that all happened with Friends of the Earth in the UK and Les Amis de la Terre in France before I even knew that Friends of the Earth in the United States even existed. I literally was completely unaware.

Until leaving. At which point Brice suggested that there might be some interest in setting up an affiliate, like-minded entity in Australia. Friends of the Earth Australia. To me, Friends of the Earth had a very attractive style. The combination of the deep research that was going on in the UK—that's when I met Amory Lovins for the first time—with the political organizing philosophy of the French. So I went back, stopped in Thailand, then Australia, and then went to New Zealand, and in each of those three places I started little fires and laid the name Friends of the Earth. In Thailand and New Zealand—particularly Thailand—I found the people that started Friends of the Earth in those places. In Australia I was very directly involved.

Setting up Friends of the Earth in Australia was a very complex story, intertwined with the national environmental politics of Australia. In Australia, members of unions were deeply involved in urban environmental conservation, and in wilderness conservation, as well. Workers would directly put down their tools, put a green ban on the site of a bad project, and say, "We're not doin' it." Then there was a national-government-backed Nature conservancy organization called the Australian Conservation Foundation, whose job was basically to stab the more activist groups in the back.

It all came to a head over the Lake Pedder campaign in Tasmania. Lake Pedder is really where the modern environmental movement in Australia began. It was a lake in the middle of the wilderness, just the most beautiful area. A glacial alluvial lake, brown water, with a white-sand beach three hundred meters wide by three kilometers. No actual surveys were ever done, but there were at least thirty species that were

endemic to that lake. The hydroelectricity commission, which at that point had more than half the budget in the state of Tasmania, wanted to dam and flood the whole valley, and then dam and flood the valley next door, to build hydro plants for which there was no demand. *They had a vision.*

There was a huge clash. The lake was flooded in 1972—we lost that one—but the Australian conservation movement began. And, as of last year, we have the Greens, who were really born in that struggle, in the cabinet running the government of Tasmania. The hydro is being dismantled. The whole culture has been transformed. It's taken a generation to do it. Federally, the Greens hold the balance of power in Australia and they're quite influential in Australia. In the Lake Pedder campaign, the Australia Conservation Foundation really knifed the Lake Pedder activists in the back, politically, so several groups—genuine Greens—made a concerted effort to take over the ACF. And they succeeded. The Australian Conservation Foundation has now become a credible organization.

We set up Friends of the Earth Australia at this crucial time, late '73, because we didn't trust the power structure. We wanted a parallel, autonomous networked strategy, combined with research that could stand up and speak truth to power. So that's what we did. The first action of Friends of the Earth Australia was to send a boat out to Mururoa. The second action was to start a campaign to save the mountain Baw Baw frog. We wrote a letter to the minister, threatening to occupy the ski lift that would destroy the frog's only remaining habitat. We succeeded.

The problem is the frog is now gone, a victim of the global amphibian crisis.

We began an anti-uranium campaign. It was at this point, finally, that I started to send letters back to the Friends of the Earth network. "Say, what's going on internationally? Are there resources? Are there speakers? Are there publications that we could draw on? We need stuff on nuclear power. We're starting to find uranium here." At that point, Australia was actually exporting uranium to France, where they were

putting it in bombs and bringing it back to Mururoa, blowing it up, and irradiating us.

So that's when I finally got in touch with the San Francisco office of Friends of the Earth. The mother organization. About time, I guess. As a result of that contact, I was invited to go on the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme in Nairobi in October of 1974. That's where I met Dave. And that's where Friends of the Earth International really was set up. This was the founding year of UNEP, and it was UNEP's first governing council. All the NGOs turned up. Huey Johnson was there. And some guy from Audubon. His name isn't coming to me, but he was terrific.

So at that meeting they were trying to figure out what to do. I made a suggestion, which was adopted by the whole assembly. It was that we set up a secretariat, made up of all NGOs, which would be called the Environmental Liaison Center. That went forward and was adopted by the assembly and we all went home. We got a mandate that Friends of the Earth in San Francisco, essentially Dave Brower, Barbara Belding, and a few others, would run the secretariat. Later that rotated to different Friends of the Earth organizations around the world.

The following year there was a bit of a crisis at the meeting. They couldn't really find a candidate to actually run the thing in Africa—no candidate who was going to be acceptable both to the South and to the North. It turned out that an Australian was sufficiently chic, if you like. Not American, but acceptable to the North, yet *from* the South. Sort of acceptable, anyway. So I went to Nairobi for a year and set it up. In May of '75, I came through San Francisco, saw Dave again, and then went out to Nairobi. Dave himself came out that year to Nairobi for the Governing Council meeting in 1975.

This is when I first really talked to him in any depth. There was a local who had a house outside Nairobi where we were having dinner one night. And that's where I connected with David in a sort of very spiritual and personal level for really the first time. It was a very poignant moment. We were standing outside, the blazing Southern Cross and the

whole Milky Way above us, on the equator. I can't actually remember what he said, but I do remember it was quite inspirational. It was just a few words. He basically said, "I trust you and I'm convinced you can really do something to save the planet." Whew! Really? I can't tell you how much that meant.

We invited him to come out to Australia and speak. He did. We had small numbers to hear him, but he had a big impact. These were the local Australians who were organizing regionally. They were *very* local. Some of them were very experienced organizers, and others had, you know, *some* experience, and had traveled. But their concerns were almost parochial. They were concerned about uranium mining, but weren't necessarily concerned about the whole nuclear fuel cycle. What they cared about was the Kakadu Wilderness, Aboriginal land rights, uranium—it was all very parochial. But Dave reached all of them. They were all moved.

There was one character in particular, who was from up north, his name was Strider—that was his nickname—and he was about as close to a hippie organizer as you can imagine, but *just tough as nails.* Strider had an ability to move people, and to work closely with Aboriginal people. He was about as hard a nut to crack as you can imagine. But Dave did move him. I still remember Strider spending hours looking through those bloody Exhibit Format books that Dave produced. This is someone, Strider, who lived in Kakadu, which is one of those places Dave's books were about. If Dave had made a book about Australia, it would have been a book on Kakadu.

There just aren't so many people in your life that had a saintly kind of aura around them. Dave had that. That was the charisma of the man. We all know he had faults. Many faults. We can talk about them, if you like.

Well, one of them had to do with his failure to control the budgets of his organizations. I mean, hands-on control, in two respects. One is, always respect the budget. In the sense that, yes, take risks, but take risks that you have under control, so that if the worst happens you have

a backup. Dave didn't do that. He went the extra distance out there on the precipice. And of course, when he fell, there was no one there to catch him.

The civil war at Friends of the Earth, to me, it was like a great tragedy unfolding. The players who were in combat, at that point I really didn't understand what was going on, but I just knew it was wrong. Of course, the same thing had happened at the Sierra Club. It was a syndrome with Dave. At some point, he just didn't care about money. And he was right. But he was also wrong. It was a flaw of his, and it was an unnecessary flaw. I think you can take enormous risks, but that those risks are better taken when you have a sense of where the spongy terrain is. Before you stand on it. At least that's what I found.

I'm constantly updating. I mean, I can tell you to the month how far away forward we're funded. For one thing, it's kind of looking after the people you have working for you. Because they don't necessarily have the big picture, from where they sit. If you really want them to go the extra mile and do the extra hard yards, you owe it to them. They have kids they have to raise.

I keep going back to the night in Nairobi, when Dave and I had our conversation, the sky just blazing with stars. Had I not had that conversation, I think I probably would have gone into a much more political career in Australia, and never left the continent.

Dave's inspiration and direction, or not *direction*, but guidance, even without intending it—I don't think it was particularly intentional—it had a way of orienting you so that you saw that there was much more possible. Much more that could be done. And here were the steps. His brilliance was to be able to envision an outcome, and convince you that it was so important, and so necessary, and feasible. It was just a matter of finding a pathway. If you can envision the outcome, and if you can envision the pathway, you can do it. And it's true. You can! That was the brilliance of the man. He got you so focused, so *committed*, that you were going to be able to do anything, provided it was legal. Well, legal didn't really matter; provided it was ethical. But he never really told you how

to do it. He probably wouldn't have known. But he convinced you that it was plausible, feasible, possible, and necessary to do it. So you then just did it. He was completely fearless. As a result, so were his protégés. He would ask the questions and they would go find the answers. You did things that were apparently impossible. If you'd asked yourself, at the time, are they possible, you probably would have said no, and stood back, and not tried. But you did not stand back. You tried.