

## **AWARDS LUNCHEON ACCEPTANCE SPEECH**

November 8, 2014

I am greatly honored, Mr. Reed, to receive this award from you today, not only because of your very impressive lifelong and historical environmental achievements, but also in light of what your mother stood for, how she raised you, and how she influenced you.

Like you, my parents afforded us kids lots of time to explore the natural world here in Florida. I would not be who I am today without those experiences, and some of that time was on my own, in the woods and in and on the water. Thanks, Mom! My brother, Steve, is here today and it's no wonder he is a lover of the ocean and a skilled fisherman.

We know now that there are certain cognitive abilities and perceptions that form only in childhood with time spent in natural settings. I use my childhood experience to explain, in part, why when I was teaching sociology I created a novel Society & the Environment course at Broward College and began work on my PhD in Environmental Studies. My calling was, and is, to help usher in a new paradigm of sustainability, desperately needed because we keep fighting what seems like never-ending battles to preserve and protect the ecosystems we depend on.

As some of you know I have health issues, and became terribly ill from what is known as Environmental Illness while teaching in a sick building at Broward College in the late 1990s. Think of me as a canary in the coal mine, the girl in the bubble, or even a Kilroy sending messages that pollution is in the water. I have been hospitalized several times after pesticide exposure, for example.

That there is a connection between what we do to the Earth and what we do to ourselves is a lived experience for me. A daily lived experience.

After years of searching, and with my mother's help, we finally found a safe home for me in 2004. It has been a very long and challenging journey. I slowly recovered and saw good improvement as long I was protected from toxic chemical and mold exposures. However, there's a new anthropogenic, biologically active and increasingly ubiquitous environmental agent that I must contend with and that is Radio frequency radiation from things like smart meters, but that story is for another day.

What I have to offer, I think, as a result of this experience, is that I have become practiced in the art of sustained hope, a hope that dares to counter what looks like an impossibility, a hope that dares to hope for an answer yet unseen.

That I am standing here is a great privilege, and quite unexpected. By all accounts I should not be here. Very, very dear people have gently coaxed me forward. This includes Carol Herzog, who took me on my first canoe ride in years in the Savannas paddling for the both of us (and who's been a dear supportive friend since then); George Jones, who despite my protests pulled me into the Conservation Alliance and then the Rivers Coalition; other members of the Conservation Alliance who have accommodated my need for a non-toxic environment – which includes us meeting in the open air today. Of course, Lace Vitunac and her wonderful family, who heap praise on me, pushing me to do more than I intended, like become President of the CA.

That art of sustained hope, along with my native Florida biophilia, is the reason I have led the Alliance's fight against the Halpatiokee bridge that is proposed to go through not one but two state preserves. It is the reason that I don't blink when it is declared that the bridge is "a done deal." I know that with faith, perseverance, great people working together, and a little serendipity, anything is possible. Of course, it still takes hard work, as everyone here knows too well.

I'd like to leave you with a meditation from one of the greatest influences I had during my studies. I am mentioning it now, because I know we all get tired, the job is too big, the political climate too hostile, the public is misinformed or apathetic, and so on. The quote is from Thomas Berry, whose philosophy serves as a paradigmatic template to help us understand how we got to our awful environmental predicament and where we need to go in order to move to sustainability.

In his book, *The Great Work*, he suggests that our challenge ahead to is recognize, to *admit*, that humans *are* wholly connected to all life, that our actions *do* have implications to the integrity of the web of life. But most critically, we must restore and live by a sense of wonder and mystery that the life on the planet and our place in he universe provide. That wonder is what gives us the sustenance and the fortitude to continue the Great Work of our era.

This is the meditation:

In your mind's eye, imagine for a moment that you are in space, and you see a blue pearl, which you know to be the Earth, then look around at the huge expanse of the other planets and the stars. Here's what Thomas Berry says about our place in the universe and the guidance it can provide:

*If the dynamics of the universe from the beginning shaped the course of the heavens, lighted the sun, and formed the Earth, if this same dynamism brought forth the continents and seas and atmosphere, if it awakened life in the primordial cell and then brought into being the unnumbered variety of living beings, and finally brought us into being and guided us safely though the turbulent centuries, there is reason to believe that this same guiding process is precisely what has awakened in is our present understanding of ourselves and our relation to this stupendous process. Sensitized to such guidance from the very structure and functioning of the universe we can have confidence in the future that awaits the human venture.*

Now, come back to where we're at along the St. Lucie River Inlet. It's the fish, the animals that tell us what we need to know. It's like what Dr. Gilmore says, "the fish know" if we pay attention. It is what Ernie Lyons is alluding to in his essay.

Or, in simpler terms offered by Lace who told me about what inspires her to continue her work: it's what Marjory Stoneman Douglas told her at dinner years ago, "Never give up!"

Thank you dear friends for inspiring and helping me never to give up! Thank you dear Mother for standing by me.