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CAREER CHOICES

If we are ever going to get anywhere with our efforts to convince this society that we have to change the way we look at ourselves and the world about us, we are going to have to get to the kids, youth, teen-agers, high school and college students. I put in a lot of time thinking about it. The economics of it are toughest. My way of going at it has been to divide work up into two parts: work that ought to be done and work that ought not to be done. Work that ought to be done is work that makes for human well being and does not frustrate the functioning of the natural world, or work that actually cooperates with the functioning of the natural world. Work that ought not to be done is work that degrades and frustrates the natural world and its life system. The philosophy and the religion of ecology is life centered, not human centered.

But the jobs to be found are largely with corporations not at all dedicated to that way of looking at things. And the schools are committed to preparing the kids for finding work and being successful in the system as it now is organized, and that means that they are to be mentally prepared to accept the philosophy that justifies the present economics. So what kind of a letter does one write to a kid?

Dear Emily, Laura, Seth, Beth and other kids in the same fix:

You are just now setting out to find your place and your role in life, in the world, in a location, doing something. Some of the decisions that will shape your future are already made but many are not. You are exposed to a lot. You see the military recruiters in the halls at school and they are giving you a message. Many of your friends have made decisions and some of them may attract you. You lie awake at night dreaming of what might lie in the future for you and you think about what to do with your life in the next few days or months and what to do with it over the long term. These dreams are important for they will influence decisions over all your life. Good dreams and good stories involve the conflict of good and evil, the slaying of dragons and the rescue of the beautiful and the righteous.

I am asking you to look on the earth as the beautiful and the righteous, as your mother in terrible distress. I want you to identify in your mind the evil dragon as the economic system, the philosophy and the religion which makes it OK and even necessary to plunder the earth to injure the earth mother, to poison and pollute the waters and the atmosphere and the soils and to kill off the non human life forms as if they were unimportant.

Humans belong to the earth and to the earth's life system; are part of it and have the clear obligation to honor the earth and to behave in such a way as to demonstrate that honor. You are urged to love your country but your love of the land, of the trees and the animals and the life giving photosynthetic process is about a million times more important than nationalistic love of a political and economic and social entity doing a whole lot of bad things. The human animal is the only animal able to bring to the earth an understanding and appreciation of the fact that the earth is meant to flourish in unimaginable diversity of forms and shapes and colors and tastes and textures. The human purpose then is to do what only the human can do. Certainly the human is not meant to make the earth a wasteland and that is what we are doing.

The success of the present economic system depends entirely on our believing that the accumulating of possessions is the road to happiness. The constant message is that you must spend your life on a permanent shopping spree. The educational system you are now immersed in is dedicated to preparing you to accept the principles of and to succeed in the marketplace. The ongoing hoorah over the shortcomings of education is purely aimed at improving market performance in a system that is destroying the earth at an accelerating rate. I am trying to tell you that what you are being persuaded of in the schools and in the mass media is something you must reject.

The life being offered by the schools of business administration, and the schools of technology is one of cooperation with the system of, "jerk out from the land everything possible as fast as possible, turn it into money and then do it some more." The national policy is built around that concept and the commercial world needs bright young people like you to get it done. You are being fitted out to be a desirable recruit for the military, or a desirable employee of Dow Chemical, General Motors, Weyerhaeuser, RJR/NABISCO or a thousand others like them in their approach to the natural world.

What might one do? Use the education system; learn all you can but hold on to a set of values of your own, values which demand that the earth be defended, not destroyed. Your model might be someone like Freeman House out in California, spending his life reestablishing the mighty salmon to a prominent role in western ecology. You might study biology with a view to restoring plant and animal life to its proper place; repairing wetlands. You could study law and do a lifetime of fighting the battle of the ecologists and the environmentalists in the courtrooms; study politics so as to try to divorce government from its subservience to industry and the military; study journalism and write for the alternative press; study energy so as to kill off the automobile as the central artifact of American life; study architecture so as to conform our cities to the natural. Or study economics; that's where there is so much to be done. Our economists are mostly supporters of the system the way it now functions. An economic system has got to be developed which is centered on doing work that ought to be done and eliminates work that ought not to be done. There's the place I would really like to see you go.

We want to bring on conditions where every stream is a stream little kids can wade in and find crawfish and minnows in; where every woods is a place where wolves and deer and panthers live, where frightful monsters live and gods play, where fearful snakes crawl, places of terror for little kids and places of delight where grownups find their links to their origins. We want to end the reign of those who plunder and pollute and poison and thereby achieve money and power. For the aim is bring about the well being of ourselves and our species within the necessary condition that the whole of the life process prospers. The aim is to integrate the human into the life process and cease to think of the human as the only creature of any importance. Don't join the system, subvert it into something we can live in and with. All my love.

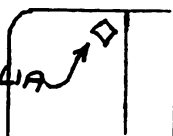
Question - There has been some talk about doing a two or three day workshop next May or June for high School or starting college kids to discuss the kind of things talked about here. Would there be any takers?

At the conference on THE LAND At Camp New Hope in October we produced a document which a few of us have been working to get into a presentable shape. That ought to be completed soon. We will then mail it out to all the people who were there for comment or agreement. Then we will try to get support for it from environmental groups, The Land Stewardship Council and the NC Council of Churches. From there we hope to go to the legislature with it.

January 1, 1989 - 2-5 PM

WINE AND CHEESE AND BLACKEYED PEAS WITH
JIM AND MARY BERRY

Please come

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