

## Unearthing one's true worldview (an ecocentric testimony)

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Available on YouTube here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yslRPnUM\\_zQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yslRPnUM_zQ)

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When I was seven or eight, there was a bookseller who came to my primary school from time to time, taking up residence in our main hall for a few days before moving on. Practising pop-up retail long before the emergence of that trend in consumerism, they set up tables and shelves of paperbacks that the pupils could browse through. At the time, I already had a wholehearted fondness for wild animals, especially monkeys and apes, and I remember a great thrill in finding a children's novel by Willard Price titled *Gorilla Adventure*. Better still, I was allowed to buy it.

As I read the book, though, my mood changed from excitement to distress. In my naivety, I had assumed that the story would be one of care and kindness. Instead, it told of an expedition to capture a mountain gorilla for a circus, with the would-be incarcerators as the heroes. I cannot recall how many pages I got through, but I know that I cried and that I had to stop before the end. Like many, and perhaps most, young children, I had a strong sense of what was right and what was wrong when it came to human behaviour towards our fellow creatures.

Concerns for the welfare of animals was not the only manifestation of my early love of nature. I was also interested in getting to know the world in my immediate vicinity. I enjoyed learning the names of wildflowers growing in the woods above my home. And I made counts of the birds who visited my garden, producing simple bar charts with my findings. Biophilia and biocentric concern were a dominant thread in my life, although, of course, I did not then know these terms.

As I reached the age of eleven and went to secondary school, however, my love of nature became slowly interred. In short, I succumbed to the war cries that define and perpetuate our nature-destroying attempt at civilization. These mutually reinforcing slogans insist that humans sit above every other mortal, that the Earth is ours for rightful and endless exploitation, and that economic growth is a noble aspiration. I was then, as I am now, a card-carrying nonconformist; but I was not immune to these motifs of modern society.

So deeply had my true feelings been buried that it was not until I turned thirty that they emerged to steer my worldview once again. I have written the story of how I returned to ecocentrism in a piece for *The Ecological Citizen*, which is linked to in the description below this video; so I will not repeat it now. I will, however, pull out two key aspects of my journey.

The first is that the practice of natural history can be hugely significant in nurturing our love of life. The second aspect – in part, a reaction against the system that suppressed my true outlook – is that an ecological civilization is likely to arise as much from the positive actions of many free-thinking individuals as through top-down control.

Unsurprisingly, then, much of the reading that I consider to have been particularly important for me is either that informed by empirical observation of the more-than-human world or that which champions the role of individual action. In the former group are works by John Muir, for instance, and, more recently, Kathleen Dean Moore. The latter group, meanwhile, includes essays and books by Edward Abbey. Also in this second set are a pair of articles written for *The Ecological Citizen* by Luke Plotica, which serve as a modern channelling of Henry Thoreau. I would highly recommend, in addition, the various writings of Eileen Crist.

I will come back, here, to Ed Abbey, whose novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* convinced me that imaginative writing could be a powerful alternative to more typical environmental rhetoric in shifting mindsets and inspiring

action. It was thus very pleasing to me when we launched a fiction series for *The Ecological Citizen* back in 2021. One of the great possibilities of such prose lies in pondering the inevitable near-future, in which we will be forced to live with far fewer luxuries but not necessarily less fulfilment. For this reason, while it is not overtly ecocentric, I particularly enjoy reading a deindustrial quarterly called *New Maps*. More generally, with my renewed passion for creative stories, I feel that I have put the heartbreak of *Gorilla Adventure* definitively behind me.

## Links

Joe's article in *The Ecological Citizen* on becoming ecocentric can be found here: <https://www.ecologicalcitizen.net/article.php?t=journey-earth-centredness>

Other writers referred to whose work appears in *The Ecological Citizen* are:

- Eileen Crist – <https://www.ecologicalcitizen.net/author.php?id=au14>
- Kathleen Dean Moore – <https://www.ecologicalcitizen.net/author.php?id=au83>
- Luke Plotica – <https://www.ecologicalcitizen.net/author.php?id=au55>