

The Power of Stories

in an Age of Fear



Center for Whole Communities

www.wholecommunities.org

2006

Themes from the conference...



Relationships are more fundamental than places or things.

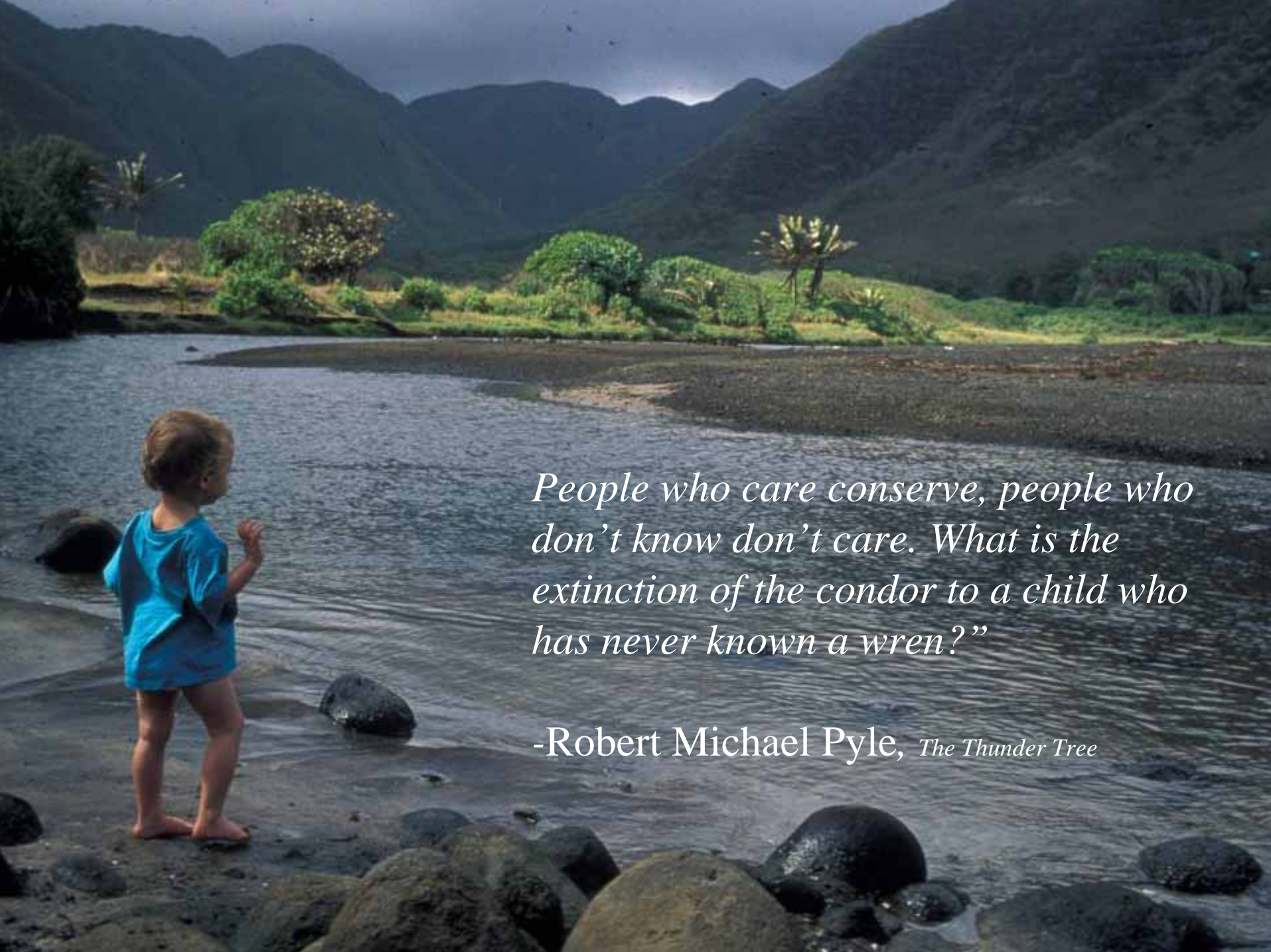




The environmental movement is really good at protecting places, but less good at protecting relationship.

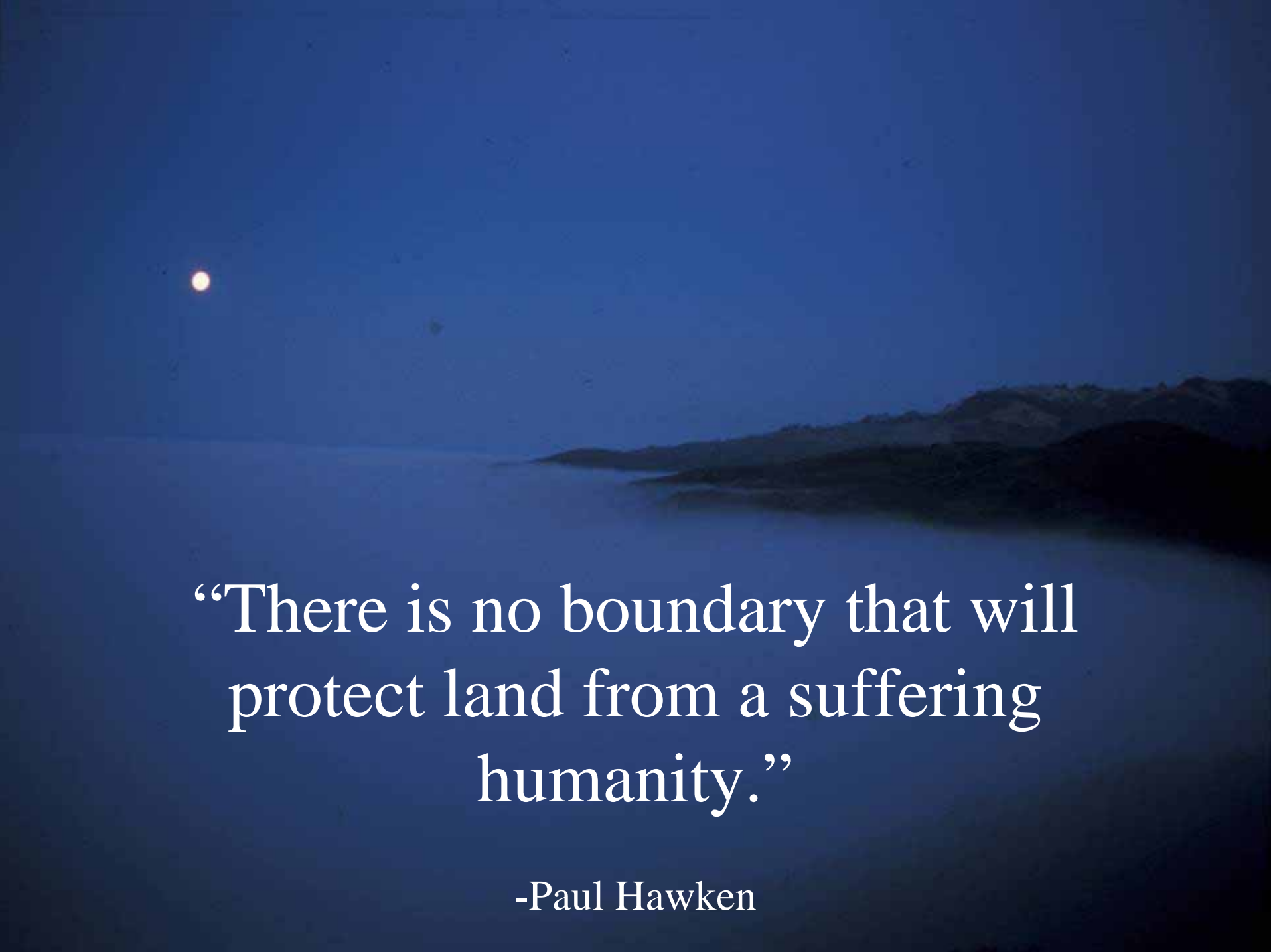


A relationship to land is the foundation of
our cultural house.

A young child with short brown hair, wearing a bright blue t-shirt and shorts, stands barefoot on a dark, rocky shore. The child is looking out over a wide, calm river that flows through a lush, green valley. In the background, dark, forested mountains rise under a slightly overcast sky. The scene is peaceful and natural. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

People who care conserve, people who don't know don't care. What is the extinction of the condor to a child who has never known a wren?"

-Robert Michael Pyle, [The Thunder Tree](#)

A dark blue landscape with a bright light in the sky and a quote overlaid. The background shows a dark blue sky with a single bright white dot in the upper left. Below the sky, there are dark, silhouetted hills or mountains. The overall scene is a gradient of dark blue, suggesting a night sky or a deep sea.

“There is no boundary that will
protect land from a suffering
humanity.”

-Paul Hawken

Whole Thinking

- Whole (hol), adj, 1. comprising the full quantity 2. containing all the elements properly belonging 3. not cut up or divided 4. to be healthy or uninjured.
- Whole Thinking refers to seeing the sum of the parts.
- Whole Thinking is the effort to identify root problems and our role in solving them.

Whole Thinking

- Whole Thinking is the practical effort to view the land as a unified whole.
- Whole Thinking includes humans as part of the ecology of the earth.
- Whole Thinking is about integration.
- Whole Thinking is acting for and from the whole.



Martin Luther
King Jr. didn't
say:

“I have a plan.”

We can't demand conservation or good stewardship.



We can only inspire it.

Everything you ever needed to know about change ... but would rather not hear.

- Models of personal change
- Models of organizational change
- Models of social change

Gandhi on Social Change:



- “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”
- “Social change occurs when deeply felt private experiences are given public legitimacy.”

Social change occurs in the presence of three forces:

1) Holding Actions: buying land, changing laws, legal, political, heroic, buying time.

2) Alternative Structures: cooperatives, restoration efforts, CSA, Ithaca Dollars, hard to see.

3) Personal Transformation: awakening, helping people to see the world differently, every conservation project becoming an enactment of another way to be human.

Our vision of the radical center is not possible without genuine change and genuine collaboration.



Genuine
collaboration
is not
possible
without a
sense of
shared
values.



We need new stories and new tools to remind us of our common courage and common assets.






GRIGGS FARM
Since 1943

599 Boston Road • Billerica, MA.

667-9111

A photograph of a man walking away from the camera on a wooden boardwalk. He is wearing a green t-shirt with some text on the back and khaki pants. The boardwalk is made of wooden planks and runs through a field. To the left of the boardwalk, there is a large pile of straw or hay. In the background, there is a dense line of green trees under a clear sky. The overall scene is outdoors and appears to be a rural or agricultural setting.

That's what
was
happening
in Billerica

They were
telling a
story about
fairness,
health and
relationship



“We can not consciously build a future we can not imagine. A first requirement, then, is to create for ourselves a realistic, compelling, and engaging vision of the future that can be simply told.”

-Duane Elgin

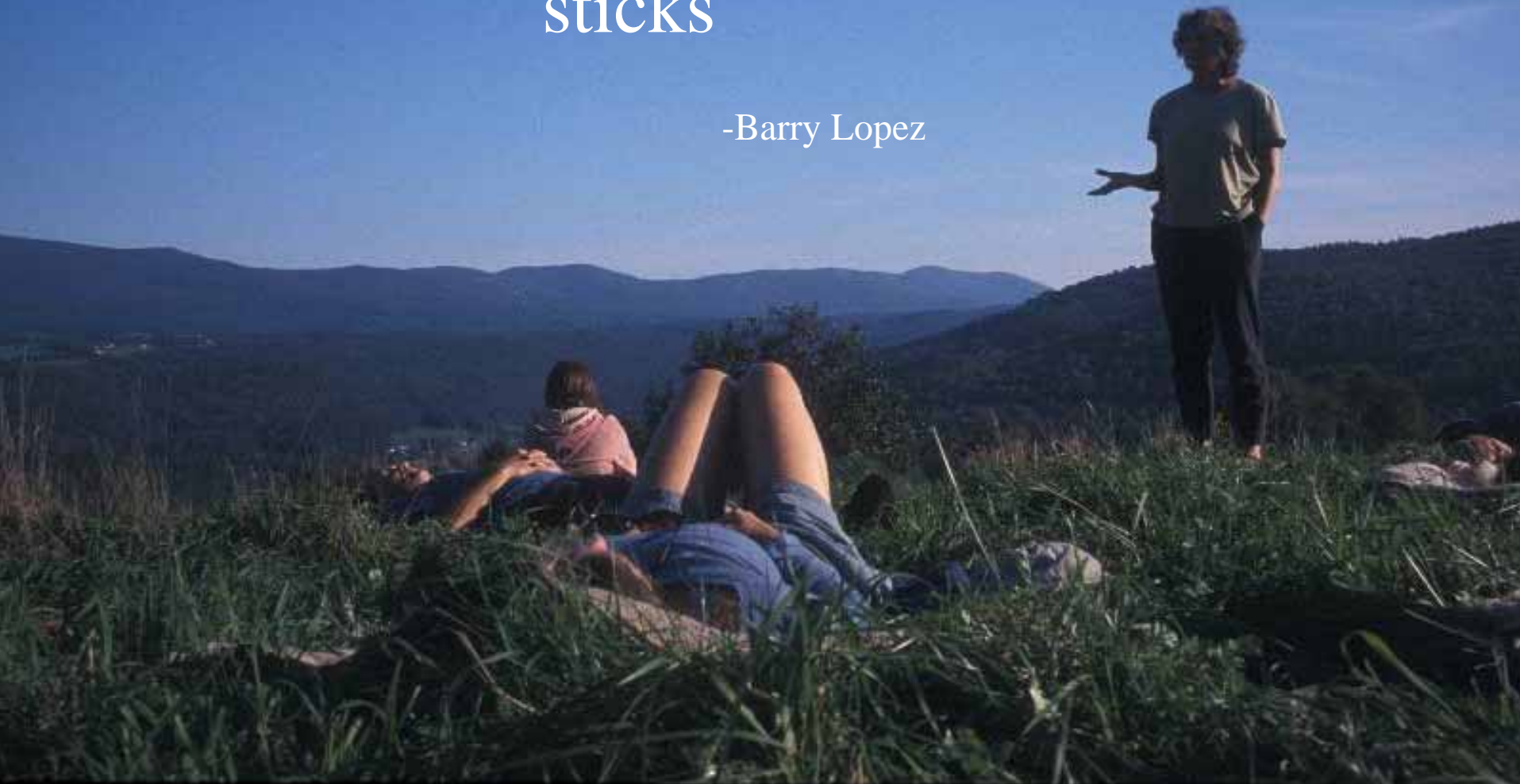
“It’s all a question of story. We are in trouble right now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story is no longer effective.”

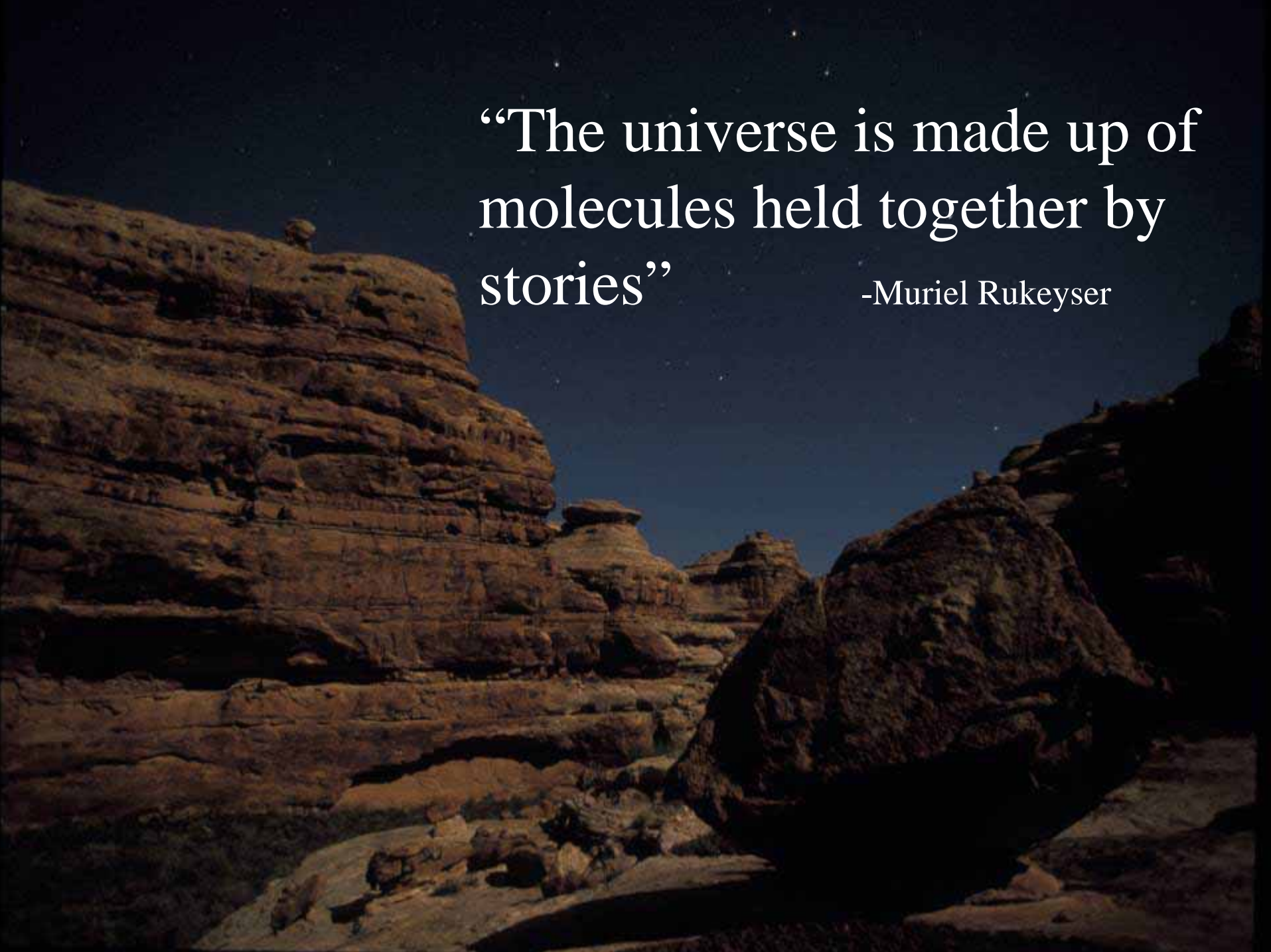
Thomas Berry *The Dream of the Earth*



“Our goal is simple: we want our country to flourish. Our dilemma is simple: we have not told our people a story that sticks”

-Barry Lopez



A photograph of layered rock formations under a dark, starry night sky. The rock formations are illuminated from the side, creating strong shadows and highlights that emphasize their texture and structure. The sky is a deep, dark blue, dotted with numerous small, bright stars. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

“The universe is made up of
molecules held together by
stories”

-Muriel Rukeyser

Stories are the secret reservoirs of values: change the stories individuals and nations live by and tell themselves and you change the individuals and nations. Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves.”

-Ben Okri



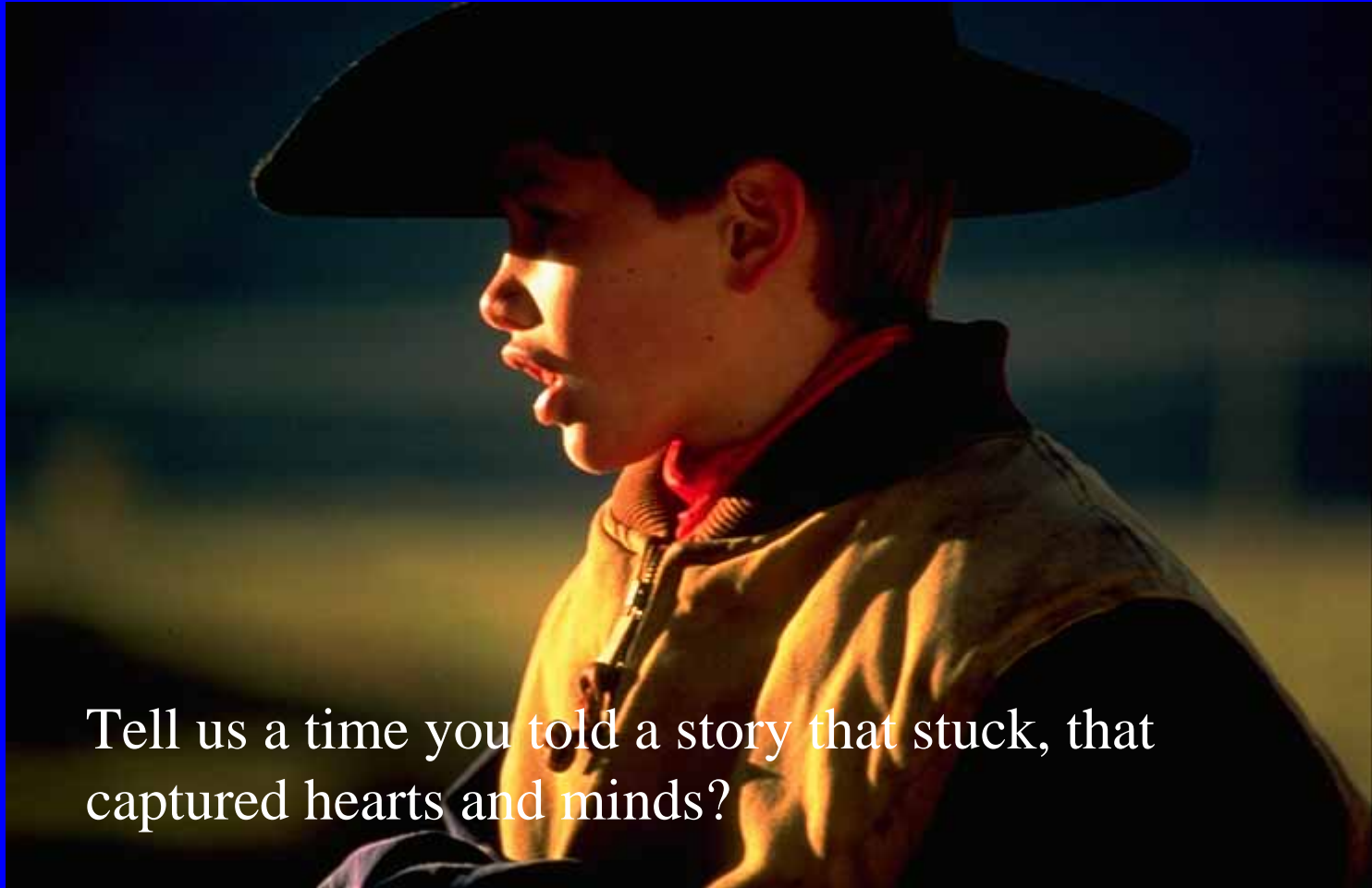
Why is Expressing our Values Important?

“As long as liberals ignore the moral, mythic, and emotional dimension of politics, as long as they stick to policy and interest groups and issue-by-issue debate, they will have no hope of understanding the nature of political transformation that has over-taken this country and they will have no hope of changing it.

—George Lakoff, author of *Moral Politics*

Values and Strategies

- Tell why
 - Big picture aspirations
 - Inspire
 - Values hold us together
 - Descriptions of the shore
 - Stories
- Tell how
 - Incremental steps
 - Teach
 - Strategies divide us
 - Descriptions of the raft
 - Plans, data, information



Tell us a time you told a story that stuck, that captured hearts and minds?

The Framework for Storytelling:

- Stories change people
- Stories change organizations
- Stories change culture

The Old Story (which we dearly love and value)

- Conserved 130,000 acres in 2002, 1.5 million acres since 1972
- Spent \$362 million saving those special places
- We've completed 2,526 projects in 49 states involving over 12,000 **different** communities
- 84% of our bond measures have been winners since 1996 which has created \$418 billion in new public dollars for land conservation
- We protected 210 different landscapes last year, one every business day of the year

The other half of the story:

- Strengthening local citizenship.
- Bringing people together around shared values.
- Showing our culture's sense of respect and tolerance.
- Healing dividedness and separation in our lives.
- Offering a positive vision for how to be an American.

Why are both of these stories important?

- Merging these stories resonates with more people.
- Raises awareness, money, and political support for our work.
- Because just running harder and faster may not be effective.
- There's a cultural tidal wave out there threatening to sweep us away.

The New Ranch Can Tell a Different Story

- The values of the land are one of the highest commitments of our nation.
- Sustainable human life on the land is possible.
- Face-to-face human community is needed.
- Democracy, fairness, and the values of public-ness are the best of America.
- We believe in building an engaged citizenry, organized around land, to advance all of the above.

This is the Story that we believe in
and want to tell our community.

But how do we get there?

Listening for our Values:

- Open What is Closed
- Reveal What is Hidden
- Balance What is Restrictive

Anatomy of Storytelling

- Becoming clear on our values and not just our mission statement
- Explaining larger meaning and benefit of our work to ourselves and supporters
- Fostering an ethic by giving voice to what matters most
- Aligning staff around shared values through storytelling

Story and Information

- Metaphor and analogy
- Empathetic
- Faith
- Subjective
- Emotional intelligence
- Data
- Authoritative
- Proof
- Factual and objective
- Rational mind

Stories of How and Why

- How we did the project
- Emergency room language
- Fear is motivator
- Focus is on us
- Short term success
- Why the land and people were worth protecting
- Language of relationship
- Empathy is the motivator
- Focus is on the land and the community
- Long term success

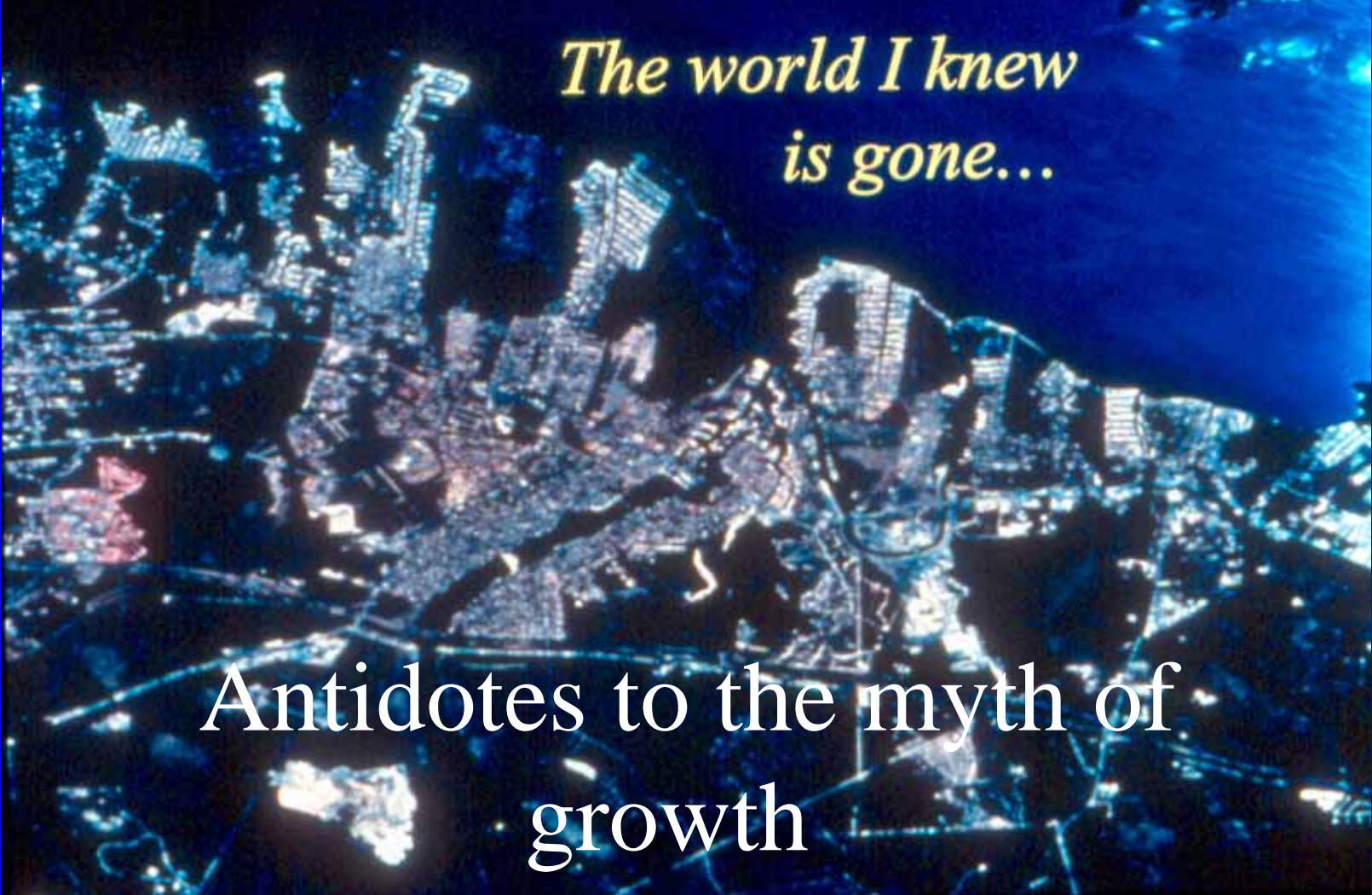
What are we listening for?

What stories do we tell?

- Stories that reflect our highest aspirations
- Stories that show another way of being human
- Stories of hope and possibility
- Stories that show our love and commitment to the diversity of life
- Stories that tell fundamental truths about the world we live in
- Stories about how we would like the world to behave
- Stories that give voice to other people

How do we gather these stories?

- By taking the time and effort to listen
- Through having deep relationship with diverse parts of the community
- By building trust, recognizing stories are intellectual property
- By being open to the claims of others

An aerial night photograph of a city, likely New York City, with numerous lights from buildings and streets reflecting on the water. The image has a blue color cast. The text is overlaid on the image.

*The world I knew
is gone...*

Antidotes to the myth of
growth

Antidotes to the Culture of Fear





Stories of Truth and Reconciliation



Stories about
relationship,
connection and
belonging

LEADERSHIP: “Being responsible for what actually happens in the world”

