

A Few Thoughts about My Dear Friend - Alan

Duncan Taylor

It was in the late 1980s at a University of Victoria campus rally against industrial forestry and clearcutting where I met Alan. I had just recently been hired as a sessional lecturer for the interdisciplinary Environmental Studies Program, and it was only later that I learned that Alan had not only been on my hiring committee but that he had also been one of the Program's original founders.

But it was at this rally where I first heard Alan express his belief that the denuded coastal landscapes were but a reflection of an impoverished collective mindscape, and that there could be no lasting solutions until we underwent a deep change of values and learned to live with the Earth in a very different way. The "different" ways that he was advocating had been honed from years of studying and synthesizing Western and non-Western philosophical and religious traditions – but his views went far beyond the usual academic discourse. Alan would tell us that it was over a lifetime of consciously spending time with nature that he had learned to become more and more receptive to the wisdom of the trees, the rivers, the rocks and the mountains, and so many of the other sentient beings of living and conscious Earth. So much of Alan's personal philosophy had found resonance with the thinking of the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, who had also become his close friend. Naess had coined the term Deep Ecology to describe a process of profound self-realization and identity with the larger communities of life and Alan became an internationally recognized leading exponent, author, and practitioner of this approach. In doing so, Alan was willing to swim against the current and take a risk in terms of the norms of conventional academics and what was deemed to be "acceptable" for most peer-reviewed journal publications.

It was in this context that Alan advocated a radically different way of interacting with the temperate rainforests – a way that would strive to maintain the full spectrum of forest values, and view trees as more than just commercial commodities – but also as sentient and conscious subjects. To help express and disseminate this deep ecological approach, Alan founded two superb journals – *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy* (earth wisdom) and, later, the *Ecoforestry*. All the while, Alan was also writing and editing numerous articles and books.

But perhaps even more noteworthy were his countless in-person get-togethers and classroom talks. For over a quarter of a century, and during each academic term, he would come to one of my upper year environmental studies classes to share his wisdom and writings with my students. In turn, he readily gave his time to help supervise and serve on numerous graduate

committees. And whereas for so many students, the thesis defence is a time of feeling as if they are to about to undergo a state of siege and attack, Alan always made it clear that he would only be on a committee if it would embody an atmosphere of deep caring and safety for the student. For, as he would point out, isn't true education about the discovery and actualization of a student's unique gifts – ones that the world would need for its ongoing healing?

So much more can be said about Alan's wonderful sense of humour, his humility, his magnificent intellectual breadth and generosity of spirit, his heartfelt love for the natural world, his deep love for Tory and his daughters, and, of course, his practice of "journeying" into the green world with his four-legged hiking companion, Hazel.

He often described these nature wanderings by using that Norwegian word "friluftsliv," which means "free air life," referring to the deep connection to nature that is so often found in Scandinavian culture.

Undoubtedly, Alan is now celebrating his wild "friluftsliv" spirit as never before! And I thank him so very much for entering my life at that forest rally so long ago. It was a fated life event for which I shall be forever grateful.

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