

Mr. Mindbomb – Eco-Hero and Greenpeace Co-founder Bob Hunter:

A Life in Stories.

Foreword

(A partial selection)

Stephen Bede Scharper

Stories of Greenpeace co-founder Robert Hunter could fill a book, and now, happily, they do.

This volume is a “story quilt,” with colourful swatches from Robert Hunter’s remarkable life, lovingly collected, artfully arranged, and skillfully woven together by his second spouse and cosmic co-conspirator, Bobbi Hunter.

Framed by fellow Canadian environmental paladins Paul Watson of Sea Shepherd and The Hon. Elizabeth May, MP, of the Green Party, these vibrant vignettes from friends, family and colleagues reveal an expansive soul who was of and for the Earth, and, as a result, deeply at home wherever he found himself, and wherever the Earth found him.

And the Earth did find him.

A high school “drop-out” from a broken home in rural Manitoba with a derelict dad and an overworked mom, Bob became a Governor General Award-winning author, a pre-internet, “mind-bombing” media “Einstein,” and co-founder of Greenpeace, one of the largest and most effective environmental organizations in the world. But his amazing sojourn on this planet was also filled, as these rich stories attest, with

humour, love, joy, and *wild* adventures and relationships with fellow humans--as well as flowers, whales, and rainbows.

I first found Bob, not in person, but on television. While visiting family in Toronto, I believe in the late 1980s, I recall turning the TV dial one morning and seeing a middle-aged hippie with a housecoat and ponytail, sitting in what looked like his kitchen. With a stentorian voice and calm, conversational manner, he carefully went through highlighted sections from Toronto's daily newspapers, the *Toronto Sun*, the *Toronto Star*, and *The Globe and Mail*, showing how each paper's bias shaped their stories about the environment and other key issues.

"This guy is *way* cool," I remember thinking, "and sharp." Bob's kitchen talks were my first introduction to media studies.

Lines of the Spirit

Years later, I met Bob via television as a guest on his whimsically monikered CityTV program, "Hunter's Gatherings."

He had invited me to talk about religion and ecology, an intersection I was working on as a newly-minted professor at the University of Toronto. What impressed me was not only his kindness, but also his insight into the deep sacral dimension of all reality. Though, at this point, he was an eco-icon, he treated me as an equal, an experience shared by many in this volume, and welcomed me to the set with warmth, humour, and gentle hospitality.

After the taping, he told me about how he had established "The Whole Earth Church," where the only criterion for membership seemed to be a love for and sense of kinship with the planet. I later learned through Bobbi that this "church" had quite a following, and Bob, as church leader, performed multiple outdoor marriage rituals, in which the couple in the centre of the gathered circle of guests exchanged expressions of love, and everyone in attendance pointed to them saying, "A flower is

your brother,” and then, “Zap!” (This final touch, no doubt, came from Bob’s love of comic books.)

As these stories reveal, however, there was power in that onomatopoeic “Zap!”, and people reported feeling energized and enlivened by such moments.

Though marked by intrepid eco-showdowns, tactical acumen, and brilliant writing, Bob’s story is as much about spiritual connection as environmental activism.

In our later conversations, we spoke about Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ (1881–1955), the Jesuit paleontologist whose works, though initially banned by the church, later became celebrated for showing how the divine Spirit was at work in the unfolding of the cosmos. These ideas were picked up and advanced by cultural historian and “geologist” Thomas Berry, CP, author of *The Dream of the Earth* (1988), who proposed that the “universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.” In other words, all reality has a psychic-spiritual dimension.

Bob, I sense, intuited this, and his life was guided by it. Bob was raised Roman Catholic, and his early years entailed the sacramental, spiritual cosmology and social justice teachings of that tradition, giving rise within him to what liberation theologian Leonardo Boff would later articulate as listening to the “cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth.” Bob’s deeply rooted sense of social justice and communion with the more-than-human-world and his affinity for the thought of Teilhard and Thomas Berry are linked to this spiritual lineage, leading him later to use, with favour, the intriguing term “eco-Catholicism.”

Like Thomas Berry, Bob had a deep sense of awe and reverence for the mystery and beauty of the natural world. As he wrote during one of his Greenpeace actions, “This protest is somehow connected with the nerve centre of what is thought of as religion...the emotion we know as ‘awe.’ From awe one moves to reverence... And the feeling of awe fills the boat, it fills our heads.”

Whether diving into frigid waters off a Greenpeace vessel to catch a rainbow where it met the sea, or lying in his backyard with daughter Emily asking her to reflect on the wisdom of trees, Bob Hunter had a deeply felt, innate, and joyful sense of the inscrutable wonder of the world. As Emily notes, he never felt alone or afraid in the wild. Rather, he felt at home there, and protected. If, as celebrated American naturalist Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) declared, “In wildness is the preservation of the world,” for Bob Hunter, in wildness was the preservation of his home--and his being...

MR. A LIFE IN STORIES MINDBOMB

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