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Comments of Key Note Speaker, Paul Pritchard of the National Park Trust

For Love of Children's Earth Day Festival, April 22, 2007

"Thank you for inviting me to speak to this wonderful group. I can think of no better place to be on Earth Day than here with you, all of you who are part of For Love of Children. Earth Day is by its very nature a celebration of our commitment to the future, to our children, and to those who have made this possible.

You have honored me with this privilege to be with you, especially with Fred Taylor, your founder, and an inspiration to me as well as a dear friend.

I would like your help. As I struggled with these comments, it dawned on me that I need to give these comments to my children, my daughter, and my sons. I would like you to help me as I write a speech for them and their children.

What is Earth Day? Earth Day was started by students and others in 1970 who were asking what we are doing to our home, the Earth, and thereby to ourselves. The issues that surrounded the first Earth Day were pollution of our air and water, toxic waste in our communities, chemicals in our food, and cancer in our bodies.

Unfortunately, most of those issues still face us. As a song of the 70's cautioned, 'Time keeps on slipping into the future' (Steve Miller Band, Fly like an Eagle).

Today, we still have a lot of these issues, but we have cleaned up the air in many cities, like Los Angeles for example. We have organic foods in our grocery stores and we are restoring places like Love Canal. Why are things better in some places? Because there were people who wanted things to be better, folks like you and me. Organic farmers who started taking chemicals out of food, college students fighting for the Clean Air Act, mothers marching for cancer cures, and much, much more.

But today we have a "new" global issue, the mother of all modern issues: global warming. It is really the result of a lot of issues, of too many people using too much gasoline, of factories that belch out pollution from their smokestacks, or people who do not care.

I don't want to dwell on Global Warming except to tell you it will affect your life. Three effects that are already happening right here in your and my homes

1. More hot and humid weather means more bugs. More bugs mean more diseases like malaria from mosquitoes, blindness from flies in Africa. Global warming increases the risk of global diseases.

2. We are losing agricultural lands because of changing weather patterns. Hurricane Katrina was a perfect example. More powerful storms, damaging more resources. Less agricultural land leads to less food, more starvation, and more people wanting to move to where they and their families can live and survive. When we have a drought here, that means less water for you downstream.
3. 30% of our nation lives on coast lines near oceans. In cities like NYC, LA, Seattle, Miami, Baltimore and Washington, with the rising sea levels these places may become unlivable.

Everyday good news is coming out as people try to solve some of these problems. Just this week, you could find some of these headlines:

- USA Today, April 18, 2007: Nevada will become the #1 state in the nation for solar watts usage per capita. At the Nellis Air Force Base, 30% of its electricity needs will be met through solar power.
- Thought for Food: People are starting a new craze called "Earth Dinners", healthy toxin free food grown on organic farms. The food is tasty too!
- New York Times, April 20, 2007: The Federal Government will use "its own purchasing power to influence behavior...protecting health and the environment" by recommending that more travel providers focus on energy efficiency, paperless billing, linen reuse, and much more.
- Grist, April 18, 2007: Restaurants in Hong Kong will begin charging customers 64 cents per ounce for food that is left on their plate. Food waste has doubled in that country in the last five years, accounting for more than 1/3 of their landfill waste, increasing the production of methane and adding to greenhouse gas problems.
- Time, April 9, 2007: Issued "The Global Warming Survival Guide" offering 51 things we can do to make a difference.
- Vanity Fair's 2nd Annual Green Issue highlighted the activists, scientists, students, musicians, artists and businesses who are propelling a cultural turnaround regarding environmental awareness.
- My favorite story was that of the students who make up the Energy Action Coalition, which is demanding bold actions to actually solve the problem of the climate crisis by "giving hope to those who previously felt powerless as their parents and politicians dropped the biggest ball of all: Earth."

I keep asking myself, why is the Earth going through such catastrophic change?

There are two theories that resonate with me:

The Gaia Theory (from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaia>)

Three scientists, one working on cells, another researching Mars, and one a microbiologist, came to the same conclusion in the 1970's that the Earth is like you and me: The **Gaia hypothesis** is an [ecological](#) hypothesis that proposes that living and nonliving parts of the earth are viewed as a complex interacting system that can be thought of as a single [organism](#). Named after the Greek earth Goddess, this hypothesis postulates that all living things have a regulatory effect on the Earth's environment that promotes life overall. Now, it is called Earth System Science but I think the "Gaia theory" is a better term because it reminds us of our spiritual western roots in Greek philosophy.

A second and possibly related concept I will call Beaham's Hypothesis.

A friend, world renowned businessman and visionary, Gordon Beaham of Kansas City, suggested that life is faster except the human brain does not function faster.

For Example: 100 years ago, humans traveled by horse at 5 miles per hour (individual), or by train at 30 miles per hour (groups). Today we travel by cars at 45 miles per hour (9 times faster), or planes at 400 miles per hour (11 times faster). Technology increases at exponential rates, but the human ability to adjust to these changes has not increased at 10 times the rate even with computers and artificial intelligence. So we by our very nature as humans are not correlating the effects of changes we humans render on the Earth

So, after hearing all of this today, you may be asking yourself, why should I care?

1. It is your future
2. It is your health and safety
3. It is your right – to have life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness

Now you may ask yourself, ok - But what can we do?

Buy CFC light bulbs; practice more recycling, reuse plastic bags, etc. Take care of yourselves, avoid cigarettes and other harmful drugs, avoid fructose corn syrup. Eat organic and consume more local foods, walk more! Forget Styrofoam, plant a tree...

There are seven lessons I have learned that I am trying to pass on to my children:

1. Take care of your health, without it you can not be what God has given you life to give, to share to ponder.
2. Learn to laugh: Not just for a break, which you will need as you deal with these challenges. A writer, Norman Cousins, decided that it was laughter that helped him live longer with cancer, not drugs and surgery. Bob Newhart once said,

laughter gives us distance; it allows us to step back from an event, deal with it and then move on.

3. Learn something from everyone: Teachers, parents, politicians, as my grandfather said, you can learn from everyone, either things you need to know or things you don't want to.
4. Forget about blame: The irony is the same people who create the problems suffer like you and me from the problem. Blame just eats away at us. Focus on change, what you are going to do about the problem
5. Focus on Love: Listen to my friend in China who wrote when he heard about the shooting at Virginia Tech: we must all learn to love. Wang Zao Sheng
6. Take care of birds, take care of nature: They give us inspiration to soar, to sing and maybe even medicines to save ourselves. Don't take nature for granted, places like Rolling Ridge, like Outdoor Education Center. Michael Frome said "Everywhere in the country the land, the rivers, the estuaries ...are treated only as commodities to be bought and sold, explored and exploited for material benefits only, never to be safeguarded by one generation as a sacred trust for the next generation..."In an age of Enlightenment, Wildlife comes first and not last."
7. *Seven generations sustainability* is an ecological concept that admonishes the current generation of humans to be working for the benefit of the seventh generation into the future. "In every deliberation we must consider the impact on the seventh generation... even if it requires having skin as thick as the bark of a pine."- Great Law of the Iroquois

So I leave you with a prayer that you find some understanding in my words as you have helped me better understand how to talk to my children. The need for change bulldozed a road down the center of my mind. **Maya Angelou.**"