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REMARKS BY
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Dinner in Honour of the Dialogue on Children, Families and Nature Government House, Victoria BC February 21, 2007

HAdeC: Inspector Darrell CD McLean

Dr. Milton McClaren, Author Richard Louv, Silken Laumann, Peter Robinson, Rick Kool, Eric Higgs, Elin Kelsey, Kesho Trust Director Bob Peart, participating members of the Dialogue on Children, Families and Nature.

We are indebted to Royal Roads University, Mountain Equipment Co op and the University of Victoria School of the Environment for bringing us together this evening here in the Ceremonial Home of all British Columbians, on this site where honours have been awarded for excellence in our Province since 1865. The Kesho Trust was created by Bob Peart as a not-for-profit endeavour dedicated to Conservation, Education and First Nations interests, being explored through this Dialogue on themes in which you are presently engaged.

We are proud to welcome Richard Louv, whose research, principles and philosophy are contained in his recent work titled: 'Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from nature Deficit Disorder'. Mr. Louv's leadership is designed to refocus our attention on integrating and applying academic literature as it relates to "Nature Deficit Disorder" and 'Ecological Illiteracy'. Most of us who have been 'labouring in the Environmental 'vineyards' over many years now, are very conscious of the sudden upsurge in public attention to broad topics that are related to ecological and environmental sustainability. However most of us are somewhat surprised, although pleased to see a seeming sudden public consciousness of the reality of Global Warming and Climate Change. No longer are we 'Cassandra's' of an unknown cause, we are instead compelled to seize this moment of opportunity with powerful strategies and honest action.

Perhaps it is because we British Columbians are particularly blessed with

such easy access to the natural world that most of us do not feel 'cut off' from the gifts of beauty that surround us. This Province is a land not merely 150 years old as our formal history would indicate, but is in fact built on the solid foundation of countless First Nations Peoples who have lived for eons beside the Rivers, in Valleys, on Islands, in Coves and Inlets bounded on one side by the Pacific Ocean and on the others with boundless, blanketing Forest lands, all filled with rich and intricate ecosystems of mutual support. Because of our topography, geography and history, members of the human family who have lived here since 'time immemorial' lived separated from each other, giving birth to a host of differing languages, customs, cultures and spiritual beliefs. Even today British Columbia boasts fully 1/3 of all the indigenous languages still spoken in Canada. The reason that First Nations inclusion in the search for greater access and understanding of the Natural world is so important is that indigenous cultures are out-growths of the Land itself and I contend the longer we too live with this land the more like it we all become.

The very music, regalia, dances, songs, foods, ceremonies and habitations of First Nations are historically intrinsically linked to the land. It is the land; the great Western Red Cedar (*Thuja Plicata*) in particular that was the foundation material of Coastal Peoples. Part of their existence was immersed in amending the great red Cedar to human use in a vast variety of ways, from clothing, as in fine capes lined with sea-otter fur, or rain-resistant hats, skirts and mats, it was also used for utensils bowls, baskets, boxes, and in dramatic arts as masks, rattles and paddles, great cedar beams supported housing, with finely carved interior house and outdoor poles to identify the family within, they fought the ocean in great Cedar Canoes ranging from Alaska to Baja California. Today cedar relics lay covered in blankets of moss, or in Museums or Art Galleries, as evidence of the vast 'Cedar' culture that once thrived here. It is an example of reconciling our immemorial past with our present and future, since we are aware that we can not overlook the impact of the Natural World on our history and our modern perceptions, actions and responsibilities.

I am very encouraged by the Kesho Trust initiative, coupled with Active Kids, Right to Play and other groups, you are finding a new direction for today's children and helping to put them in touch not just with the natural world, but with themselves. As a Child, I had unrestricted access to the great Skeena River eco-system of Mountain, Forest, River, Wildlife, Fresh and Salt Water-life, coupled with a privileged interaction with some of the most ancient cultures on this Continent. (*The village of Kitkatla on the North Coast is regarded as one of the longest,

continuously inhabited communities in North America, being in the range of some 15,000 years!)

I climbed cliffs, scrambled over rocks, rowed, explored and carried back to my little community forest and river objects, artefacts and presumed treasures that on occasion even as a 10 year old, I proudly displayed. The skeleton of a wolf, a great fungus or mushroom, an abandoned Eagle's nest, a shell, a Seal's carcass that was very pungent! I would commandeer the remains of a flying squirrel, perhaps downed by a hawk, impressions of animal foot-prints, Deer velvet, abandoned stag horns and much, much more and all my mother ever worried about concerning predators were Black Bear and River Wolves...(that is apart from the accumulation of these 'Wonders of the Woods'!).

On lonely winter nights long-legged grey and tan Wolves commenced their progressive howls at the north end of the River, cascading westward to the estuary near our little house in a thrilling salute to the moon. These experiences coupled with creation tales, legends and stories of neighbouring First Nations filled my childhood's creative imagination as nothing else could and even today, my consciousness often ranges back along the banks of that great river, and is refreshed and inspired by the experience. (although today, I would more likely watch a Whale off Long Beach in Pacific Rim National Park!)

In a 'wired world' too many kids are denied the experience of locking eyes with a wild animal or smelling the stench of a Black Bear at Salmon time. They rarely even see a chipmunk or porcupine or beaver and are unable to name even half dozen resident birds. BUT the fear of human Predators overshadows all, keeping Children enclosed, enwrapped and endangered through a lack of connection to the world that surrounds and that defines them and us. In the days of the Cave with the Sabre-toothed tiger, whose lethal modern equivalent, the Cougar still prowls Vancouver Island, children ranged free to learn their own strengths, testing themselves against nature to discover any weaknesses. Today, the equivalent of our ancient 'fight or flight' reaction is found in video and computer games where enemies are 'liquidated' without conscience or consequence through finely developed 'hand-eye' coordination, fast neural synapses and technological skills that substitute for strengthening the body and disciplining the mind.

As Richard Louv tells us the result: is obese kids, lethargic kids, disinterested, disconnected and disengaged kids; young people who are engulfed in challenges, and yet who prefer to take on 'make-

believe' worlds rather than actual, natural world in which they live. One need not take on an extreme sport to experience nature, its power is all around us and I submit it particularly surrounds those of us blessed to be 'supernatural' British Columbians. Kesho Trust reminds us of an obligation demanding strategies of access to nature that are safe, yet still undiminished, that are real and not contrived, and that can add to our sense of compassionate humanity rather than de-humanize our ancient instincts of wonder. That thought was expressed by Rachel Carson in her seminal book on the Environment, remaining today as a legacy to our children:

"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is a symbolic as well as actual beauty in the migration of the birds, the ebb and flow of the tides, the folded bud ready for the spring. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature – the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after the winter"
Rachel Carson, Silent Spring 1962.