

# Colin's Radical Idea

**The Subject:** The future of the human race

**The Essence:** We face the gravest of problems

**The Solution:** A global people's movement - The Spirit of Adventure Foundation



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**I** **Imagine you are superman.** You can experience the feelings of all human beings throughout history and can access all knowledge. You go back in time and observe how many primitive tribes lived in harmony with planet earth. You then scroll through human history up to the present day. Before you fly off to another planet for your sanity, an obvious question arises,

“How is it that humans with their intelligence, skills and creativity have left such an appalling legacy of destruction - to their fellow men; to other life forms and to the planet and its ecosystems ?”

Of course you know the answer. Man has increasingly regarded himself as both separate from and superior to, wild Nature. In that separation, money, status and intellectualism have dominated. Inevitably that has also meant the domination of the vices.

As you fly off elsewhere, you know that if this arrogant and mistaken attitude continues then the human race is heading for extinction.

As a member of that human race, I want to respond to superman

- First, reflecting on my own experiences, I agree completely with his comments  
- Secondly, to say that, the only solution I can see is a Global Peoples Movement based on the ancient wisdom that we all have a unity with Nature. Furthermore this Movement - in the form of the **Spirit of Adventure Foundation** - will need to be millions strong - sufficiently powerful that it can replace the false God of materialism with all that is noble about being human. In other words goodness needs to become the driving force of the human race.

I am confident that I have something of the truth as my “knowing” comes from reflection on experiences, as well as wide reading. Whilst scientific proof is always valuable, it is never a substitute for “knowing” in its deepest sense.

Come with me now as I explain how my life’s journey led me to the belief that we need a Global Peoples Movement.

## **PERSONAL ADVENTURE**

Bored with school, except for sport, I tried climbing on Derbyshire gritstone with a school friend and mum’s clothes line. By the end of the day I was shattered and elated. Here, at last, was a really exciting game. For the next 16 years, as far as was possible, climbing was my life.

At College in Oxford, fellow student Bernard Jillott became my climbing partner and inseparable friend. Within 2 years he was dead - killed in the Himalayas. The Warden of my College, Canon Eric Abbott (later to become the Dean of Westminster Abbey) asked to see me. After commiserating with me, he asked what I intended to do. I replied I was considering giving up climbing. Very quietly, he said,

“You must continue climbing, only now you must climb even harder, because you are climbing for the both of you.”

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Eventually I gave up climbing as my major activity, because of lack of progress in my performance. Instead I took up white water kayaking and surfing - then moved on to sea journeys in a tiny 2-man racing catamaran, and, finally sea kayak expeditions. Each of these three forms of adventure became, as far as was possible, a way of life for several years. In each I progressed from novice to a level where my life was in danger.

Nietzsche's famous comment comes to mind concerning adventure, "Believe me! The secret of reaping the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment from life is to live dangerously."

## **MY WORK**

In 1965, as a young teacher I created and led a Manchester Grammar School expedition of 30 boys to Arctic Norway. Working independently from the 3 staff in small groups, they climbed all the peaks within an area of around 100 square miles. They proved to me that 16 to 19 year olds were extremely capable of serious adventure.

I then spent 6 years in Wales running an outdoor centre for the city of Oxford. All 15 secondary schools sent thirty 14 year olds for a fortnight's course. Like Outward Bound we gave them a hard time and they thrived on the challenges.

I was so inspired I created what became The National Association for Outdoor Education, wrote booklets and lectured as far away as Australia on the values of adventure for the young. I felt sure that if these young people were the citizens of tomorrow, then the future of society was bright indeed.

My final 20 years before retirement were spent in the Lake District - training students to become adventure teachers. The main focus of the College was the 5-11 year olds. I felt sure this age group was too young for serious adventure. I was wrong. Over a period of 6 years, for example, using a community project and students from my one year international course in adventure as teachers, the following occurred.

- self reliant expeditions by groups of ten, 10-11 year olds - over the Lakeland hills and a 100 mile kayak journey down the river Wye. These were 5 day camping trips, generally without contact by the adults responsible for them. The groups were mixed and it was before mobile phones.
- six youngsters represented Great Britain in white water slalom and racing.

## **WHAT DID I LEARN FROM MY WORK ?**

First - there is an instinct for adventure.

Second - young people are immensely capable.

The natural challenges demanded they gave their best. This was mentally, physically and, not least, emotionally. Key virtues were required e.g. determination, team work, vitality, empathy. Most important of all, they needed to control their fears through self discipline. By doing this they developed the self confidence and self respect so important in life.

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I became convinced of the likelihood that all young people need to be challenged in wild Nature - because Nature is imprinted within them and because they thrive on such experiences. This, in turn, should lead to “natural” examinations - self reliant expeditions and sharp end adventure.

As Professor Meredith noted in the 1960's,  
“The most important aim in Education is courage”.

## **UNITY**

Moving on now to something beyond the excitement of adrenalin adventure.

In 1982 I did a solo kayak expedition on the Pacific up the coast of Alaska. During the first week of unsettled weather and choppy seas, I became increasingly aware that, when on the water, I was somehow going ever deeper into my inner self. The depth of this feeling was so immense that even the deep feelings of falling in love paled into insignificance.

In my book “Beyond Adventure”, I described it by analogy. My kayak, unlike a yacht, has no keel, but “psychologically” I felt I had a keel so deep it seemed to be bottomless. This feeling remained with me for the rest of the expedition.

Mystified, I eventually began to find an explanation. The ocean had to be imprinted in my unconscious - as if a button within me marked “ocean” had been pressed.

I realised other experiences had been unusual.

In 1980 on a 10 mile training trip on lake Windermere, towards the end of the session I suddenly “flowed”. My efforts became effortless. Rationally this was not possible as such movement requires effort, yet there was none.

Another strange incident occurred when making the first night crossing by kayak from the Lake District to the Isle of Man - a 40 mile challenge. After an inspiring 10 miles paddling into a glorious sunset, it had become dark. I had become very tense as there was no sight of land in any direction and there was sea fog around. Suddenly a tiny bird fluttered around the boat. I realised it was a Storm Petrel. After a few minutes it disappeared. I carried on west into the darkness. My pessimism and tenseness had been replaced by optimism and warm feelings.

Then some years after the Alaska trip, another particularly odd experience. On a summer morning I had gone to check out a new scramble in a remote ravine in the Lakes. At the start of the climb I noticed a solitary plant with striking dark blue flowers. Up until that moment of my life, my attitude to flowers of any kind was complete disinterest. They were for the ladies! I completed the climb. Unbelievably at the top, one more flower of the same type. I had to find out what it was. My wife, a keen botanist, gave me the answer, “Aquilegia vulgaris” - the eagle flower. A new love affair began that day - with wild flowers!

All these unusual experiences, along with around a dozen others, left me in no doubt they had the same message,

In the moments of the experience, your feelings of separateness are suspended.

You have a unity with the experience.

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I am convinced virtually everyone experiences this unity. Obvious examples are falling in love - in all its senses; being absorbed into a piece of music; and experiencing those “moments of synchronicity”.

Please do not underestimate the profound importance of this non-separateness, both in terms of how we approach and how we live the detail of our lives. It is separateness not unity that is taken for granted when we live in our separate physical bodies. We need to remind ourselves frequently that none of us would exist if it were not for the unity of two people.

In 1992 I took early retirement. Solo expeditions became my way of life for the next 10 years - in the Alps, Pyrenees and along wilderness coastlines. Life was simplicity itself with a tiny tent and minimal food. In those 18000 miles or so, hard work, adventure and freedom amidst the beauty of wild Nature were my lifestyle. At first I was disappointed at the lack of unusual experiences. I eventually realised something more profound had happened. Although solo I never felt lonely. Instead of relating as previously to “fragments” of Nature, wild Nature in her entirety had become my friend. I also realised why. Man is natural and is born to move. I had merged into Nature and become part of her eternal rhythms.

I discovered I was living one of the great wisdoms e.g.

Chuang - Tzu in 4BC,

*“I and all things in the universe are one.”*

and Meister Eckhart in 1328,

*“All that man has eternally here in multiplicity is intrinsically one...this is the deepest depth.”*

Moving on now from being shaped by wild Nature to being shaped by my wife, Annette. We had fallen in love as young students, married and were together for nearly 50 years. In 2002 she enjoyed three tough month-long expeditions with me in big mountains. By May the following year she had passed away - the victim of cancer. That someone so fit could die so early was almost too much. I went to live remotely in Scotland. Wandering the mountains I knew only too well why I felt so forlorn. Her intended biographer, Margaret, described her as, “Like trying to catch sunlight in a string bag”. Her warmth, smile, naturalness and unselfishness were simply “Annette”. Her vitality was legendary - raising a family of three daughters was just part of an incredibly busy and inspirational lifestyle. There was something else which, initially, I could not understand. In her final weeks in the hospice, she had insisted that she was, “in a bubble of happiness”.

Determined to understand what that meant, I eventually rang her headmistress where she taught for 20 years. After chiding me for being so depressed, “Did I not realise how very lucky I had been to be her partner?”, she said, “Everyone, pupils and staff in both schools (Primary and Secondary) loved Annette.”

Later, in the Oxford Book of Death, I came across, “How you face death depends on how

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you live your life". I knew Annette loved her fellow humans - of all ages. I also knew she loved Nature in its entirety - from the vault of the sky to the slugs, worms and dying life forms.

Further reading from both East and West left me in no doubt, Love was the most important word in any language.

## **THE MODERN WORLD**

In the short time humans have been on the planet, they have caused havoc. Despite the considerable achievements and innate goodness, their overall record is disgraceful. As a historian and member of the human race I, for one, am ashamed. In my lifetime alone, we have allowed the false gods of materialism, instant convenience and immediate gratification, to contaminate almost all corners of the planet. Rampant consumerism is now a more powerful force than any previous or current religion. The quality of an individual has become defined by what they own - "having" more important than "being". The modern world, in practice, is essentially corrupt. It is ruled by money, status and intellectualism, by the vices rather than the virtues.

As a direct result humans now face formidable problems, including,

- destructive weather worldwide
- global warming
- pollution of air, water, soil and ourselves
- obesity
- financial and social extremism
- over population
- trivialisation

The underlying root cause is, of course, that man has increasingly regarded himself as separate from and superior to, wild Nature. Here are 3 reasons why this has happened,

### ***First - Our Weaknesses***

It is always tempting to blame others. Since time immemorial we have succumbed too easily to the various temptations to do the wrong things.

### ***Second - Our Gullibility***

We have allowed power to be used corruptly. Today a few individuals, who control mega corporations, largely decide what happens in the man-made world. They operate in a moral void and define progress in terms of maximum profit. To be effective, they require a largely compliant and confused population. They also need a system of propaganda and a mass media offering maximum entertainment. The result is we now have celebrity cultures, which emphasise triviality, egotism and an attitude of success at any cost.

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### **Third - Our Unawareness**

A general unawareness of the formidable dangers caused by living in an increasingly complex, fragmented and specialist world with its un-natural rhythms.

### **A UNIVERSAL FRAMEWORK**

If love is the most important word, then what we mean by it is crucial. We need to choose between creative and destructive love.

Imagine you have two sides. One side is your positive aspect, whose centre is creative love. This side is the home of your character strengths, known as the virtues. The other side is your negative aspect (or shadow). Its centre is destructive or egotistic love. This side is the home of your character weaknesses, known as the vices.

Between your positive and negative aspects lies your conscience. Your conscience is the battlefield between the good and the bad - a lifelong process for most of us. The more you use the virtues, the more you develop your positive potential and find well-being.

Annette clearly demonstrated the pathway to well-being. She lived in each moment driven by creative, unselfish love. That was why she moved on in "a bubble of happiness".

Her unspoken message was timeless in its universality,

Try to live the detail of your life by all the virtues.

In a materialistic world, no message could be more important.

From wild Nature came two further messages:-

**The first**, already mentioned, was to expedition as simply as possible. From that I found my unity with wild Nature and the resultant feelings of deep well-being.

**The second**, almost literally, came out of the blue. In 1997, during the expedition phase of my life, came an invitation to do a single lecture in New Zealand. I could say what I liked. But what to say? Sitting in my office, to my surprise and delight, I quickly found myself writing,

Everything in nature is alive in its own way; is on its own adventure and deserves its own well-being. Everything in nature is no more and no less important than anything else.

This I later termed "The Wilderness Message".

I came to realise that what it says is so important it should become nothing less than the basis of civilisation. Why? It creates a level playing field, not just for humans, but for "everything" in Nature. It is the pure meaning of the great virtue of Justice. Using our common sense, it demands minimal destruction as we journey onwards.

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Imagine you are born into a world where there is a global civilisation based on the ideal of trying to live by all the virtues, within the framework of the Wilderness Message. As you journey through the stages of your life you know that not only do you have this consistent values framework, but, like everyone else, you have a central aim for your existence.

This is:

***Development of all your positive potential - mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually.***

**The vision of The Spirit of Adventure Foundation is:**

“To influence modern societies to become a global civilisation based on love and unity with Nature”.

This vision needs to become a reality - a world dominated by all that is noble about being human.

The Foundation is open to all ages, is free and you can become a member **online**.

**Join now**

**Tell a friend**

**Be a part of this exciting solution**

There is a famous saying,

“There is nothing so important as an idea whose time has come”.

Let’s make this idea a reality!

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