A life of deep connection: A tribute to Haydn Washington (1955–2022)

Helen Kopnina

Helen is an environmental anthropologist at Northumbria University, UK.

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Haydn Washington, who died in December 2022, was a significant figure in the Australian environmental movement, and one of the Editorial Advisors of *The Ecological Citizen*. An author, activist and environmental scientist, Haydn helped to lead the successful campaign to have the 5,000 square kilometre Wollemi wilderness in New South Wales declared a national park in 1979, and also played important roles in many other environmental struggles in Australia. His published works include *A Sense of Wonder* (2002), *Climate Change Denial* (2011) and *Demystifying Sustainability* (2015).

In my profession as a lecturer, I am used to giving students feedback by starting with praise, then bringing out critical points, and concluding with suggestions for future learning. Remembering Haydn, let me start with the critique to get it over with, and then turn to focus on what is important: his positive contribution and formidable inspiration for us.

Haydn was not always an easy person to work with. At times he showed an abrasive personality which bordered on rudeness, if not intolerance. Especially in the later years, his reputation as a grumpy man, uncompromising in his opinions and stubborn as hell, alienated and offended some colleagues. He said things without diplomacy, without (to use one of his own favourite words) waffle. Why did he risk alienating his potential allies, of which there were many, considering the sheer volume and force of his work?

I first learned of Haydn's work almost a decade ago, when Routledge asked me to review one of his books. In his book proposal for *Demystifying Sustainability*, he said that sustainability is easy once we drop all muddles and pretences, once we learn to see things clearly, without denial. He got angry because people resisted such clarity, or got lost in the *sustainababble* (a word he borrowed from Engelman, 2013), of so-called 'sustainable development' – an approach which sustained industrial development and privileged the economy over everything else. He was not so much uncompromising, just brutally honest.

Haydn had a huge heart for all people, all species, and aside from the non-judgmental frustration that he felt at times, he never ceased to marvel at all life, and sing praise to everything that touched him, in the hope to reach others – from morning dawn in that Australian outback he was so committed to, to the whispers of the river whose rights he defended together with the Indigenous Australian community.

Haydn was fully engaged with the issues he cared about, reconciling social and ecological justice, conservation, overpopulation, steady state economics and the national parks of his beloved Blue Mountains, in New South Wales. He was guest editor of the supplement to the first volume of this journal (https://ecologicalcitizen.net/issue.php?i=Vol+1+Suppl+A), which collected personal journeys to ecocentrism and demonstrated his ability to be non-judgemental and supportive of all contributors. He was also a key contributor to the Statement of Commitment to Ecocentrism.

He was not afraid to leave this Earth. Two years prior to his death, he wrote:

> *Tumours are growing slowly and I may need to go on another nasty chemo next year. Or I may just accept my mortality and not seek to grab a few extra months even if I feel bad? I know you do not want me to consider this, but I do think about it. And no, I am not seeking another pep talk. I feel content in myself, I am not depressed. Looking forward to spending Xmas with my brother and his family.*

I want to finish this tribute by quoting one of Haydn's poems from his collection, *The Poetry of Giving Back* (2021).

Everybody dies
Everybody dies,
But not everybody lives.
For living is more than plain existence.
So much of what we do
Is complete trivia,
Could we but
Put aside distraction,
Abandon myopia,
Cease to obsess about
A cut-off-fragment
We laughingly call 'myself' –
The irony being it is not 'Number One' –
Just a mote
In the wonder
Of all that is.
Everybody dies,
But not everybody lives.
To live one must love,
But to love is to grieve,
And one can be

Overwhelmed
By the tragedy
Of our times.
Yet despair is not living.
Nor is it healing.
Everybody dies,
But not everybody lives.
To live one must
Accept the pain of loving,
Accept the loss
Of the beloved,
Put aside self-obsession,
And keep on loving –
For to be whole,
To truly live
Is to give love.

Thus, Haydn lived, as clichéd as it might sound, for love, as long as he could contribute to its flourishing, perhaps by saving a single species, even if it meant sacrificing his life for it. He could not save Australia's mountain mist frog, that was declared extinct the month of his death, but the legacy of his work is likely to help save others.

In the spirit of *The Poetry of Giving Back*, we ecocentrics should not give up our struggle, but carry our love for all living beings forth. As Haydn wrote in his editorial in this journal, "Western society has never been as divorced from wild nature as it is today. All of us can be part of changing that, of speaking out for nature's rights, of speaking of our responsibilities to the rest of life, and of celebrating life and place" (Washington, 2017: 6). Let us continue to do so.

Haydn Washington in Wollemi National Park in 2010.

References

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