

**“Wilderness & Spirit”
Willi Unsoeld**

November 7, 1974; Graduating Park Ranger Class; Albright, Grand Canyon

Editor’s note, August 2003;

This presentation was made before Willi’s daughter’s untimely death, Nanda Devi, while with him on the Nepalese mountain of the same name in 1976, and before Willi’s death in 1979 on Rainier in an avalanche. At least 2 books have been written about the Nanda Devi expedition (“Nanda Devi, Tragic Expedition”, “Fatal Mountaineer”). Truly a great sadness and end to Nanda Devi and Willi’s lives, both which have sadly offset his otherwise admirable philosophy of the gift of the outdoors. What follows is a transcription of Willi’s presentation from a CD generously given by Jolene Unsoeld. To hear it on CD is to hear it in its true context, with all the joy and concern and passion of Willi. This CD and another by Willi, his speech with Tom Hornbein to the Mountain Rescue Council in 1969, called “The Philosophy of Mountain Rescue”, are available via request to tkovacs59@yahoo.com and I will arrange for a copy from the Unsoeld family. To those who simply do not know, Willi and Tom Hornbein made the first ascent of Mt. Everest via the difficult West Ridge, in the winter of 1963 – Tim Kovacs.

MC:

His career may have begun as a janitor in a potato salad factory, according to his biography (laughter). At any rate, he got from there to the top of Mount Everest, and there are not many who manage it. He is on the faculty of Evergreen State College in Columbia, Washington. He is an Executive Director of Outward Bound. He was a Peace Corp Director in Nepal for a number of years. He has been a Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Oregon State University. He’s Chairman of the Certification Committee at the American Mountain Guides Association. He’s a man of many interests and extraordinary insights, I think. And the things he can do with a group like this are indeed extraordinary. It’s a pleasure to introduce Willi.

Willi:

I thought he was going to get carried away there for a minute. (laughter) I did. It’s hard enough to pick up the pieces after Modi. There. My name’s Willi and I hate to attack a man I’ve never been introduced to. (laughter) But in order to do Modi’s pitch justice, I have to tell you some things about myself. A few of them I just learned. (laughter) My self-image is of a self-styled guru. I come out of a Christian background, Episcopal. I also come from India and I’m non-attached, which means I float lightly on the foam of pretention far above the struggling mass. That’s my self-image. (laughter) Or it was. (laughter) And then I meet an economist – it’s almost always an economist (laughter) – and I sit back there with my blood bubbling. This shouldn’t be happening to me, remember? I’m cool. (laughter) I just imagine all the bad karma, and finally I look at myself with a new appreciation. Basically, I really am a fanatic. (laughter) And I’d kind of like to just dwell on that for a moment, using up some of that preciously scarce resource – of which I’ve been made increasingly aware by Modi’s talk (laughter) – in our case, time.

A fanatic – you know the definition. A fanatic is one who “holds his views with enthusiasm which varies directly with the amount of evidence bearing against them.” And that puts me in the picture really because part of my background is a scientific background. I came to where I am by way of science. And just by way of public confession, I have to admit to extreme nostalgia – well, Modi’s given me the chalkboard now – but remember those graphs up there, those curves? Every now and then I just get a hankering to put it all down, you know, diagrammatically. And I even went through statistics and I had calculus and I had a slip stick. Have you ever had withdrawal symptoms? (laughter) When you haven’t had a slide rule in your hands for a long time and that final sovereign gesture as the index line drops right in the slot. Man, there’s the answer. And so I went into philosophy and religion. And talk about cold turkey. I haven’t had an answer since.

And so I have to become more fanatical, more overbearing, because none of the data apply. So I really have to become enthusiastic in order to hold my own against these suckers (laughter) that

have data and procedures and cost benefit analyses. I made some notes here. (laughter) I'm always willing to create notes.

Economic value, based on what you are willing to give up in terms of – and I put the quotes in – “real” value. There's the key, ladies and gentlemen. Because ultimately “real” value reduces to dollars and cents, which are obviously measurable. I suppose my pitch today has to challenge that thesis. If I have a central core to a very diffuse presentation, it's the nature of value. And it's the nature of wilderness value. And I fanatically deny the possibility of reducing this value to dollars and cents.

I'm not a very good fanatic. Sometimes I toy with the idea of upgrading my fanatical skills. And I think probably I am encouraged by guys like Mike Frone, whom I would rate a purist fanatic. I just feel that when we get a chance at Mike, you'll find that he doesn't count the costs in any denominator. And, unfortunately, probably having been corrupted as a youthful scientist, I DO count the cost and I want to give you the message, and I want to move and shake. And yet I know it isn't going to come out that way. I just know that, as soon as I've gotten through with my act and we get through smiling and laughing at the excesses to which that character carried us, it's going to come back down to a matter of dollars and cents and Modi'll move in and take over. And, you know, as a semi-rationalist, I'd like to allow for that inevitability. And so, I guess, my overall pitch is, “Okay, okay, OKAY. It's going to be that way, so why am I wasting our time.” Okay. This is why. I want to give you THE truth. And this is the way I want it to work. I want it to bend you so out of shape...you know, over here, that when you snap – yeah, you're going to – when you snap back, it'll be in hopefully 45 degrees. If I really get a permanent set imposed upon your soul, that you'll remember some of the things you REALLY are into. And then you can do your cost benefit analyses and you can do all of these things, but with a mindset that bears in mind what can only be established fanatically.

I've given you away my game plan, which again, isn't good fanatical practice. You should save that for the end. But that's the final performance that I see us embarked upon. Okay?

There's another attack that I would want to make on Modi's pitch that when we go into the park, there are many satisfactions realized by park visitors. And all of them are rationally compared; they're rationally weighed. And this is his faith that ultimately – you know, by definition, man is a rational animal, and that means he's going to behave in a certain manner - he qualifies by saying, of course, there are certain measures that we haven't come up with yet, such as the benefits. We don't really know how to measure them and by the use of the term “option demand” and...what was the other thing... “shadow” - benefit shadow costs - we can leave an empty spot in our design that we can fill in when we get to it.

I want to introduce another factor, which I didn't hear and I think it bears directly on the job I see you guys doing. The picture that Modi draws is of our customers coming to the parks for many many kinds of realization, and we're there as suppliers of satisfactions that they come to receive. Well, in true fanatical spirit, I would like to emphasize your role as educators. The absolute necessity of training the public as to the proper values to be sought in the parks. You've got to be pretty fanatical to take that stand. It's arrogant as hell. But I submit to you that you are the experts, and if you aren't, you better become so. Experts on the legitimate use of national parks and that you are not there just to cater to public demand.

And I'd like to start, almost, my pitch at that point. It's a question as to why we have national parks, why we preserve wildernesses, and why do people come to them. And it's that question that I'd really like to speak about, and I'd like to pick up the story at that point where the park user steps out of his Winnebago – and maybe even leaves the parking lot (laughter) – and he walks into the wilderness. And so, there he is. The question is: What's going on inside that brain box of his? If we could only unscrew the cranial cap and peer in there. “Hello! Anybody home?” What you'd probably

encounter is that question, “I wonder why I am here?” (laughter) “It seemed like a groovy idea, but I don’t see nothing but trees.” I think it’s relevant to ask it from the point of view of a park ranger.

I got this inspiration from a guy named John Ricknar, who is a park ranger at Mount Ranier over at Mowich Lake. We took a group of students up there to wipe out the road. They closed the road to Mowich Lake, I don’t know, about 12 miles away from the park boundary, and make everybody walk in, which seemed pretty arrogant to a lot of people. And when we’re asking John, “How can you justify this?” He says, “Willi, we’ve been watching these people for a number of years now, and they tool up in their cars and there’s no place to park. It’s a real narrow valley right up to the Lake. So we have walkie talkie rangers to stop them as it gets so clogged up that you have a monster traffic job. So we stop them increasing distances up to 3 or 4 miles down the road, “Well you’ve got to park here, ma’am.” “Well, how far to the Lake?” “That’s outrageous. How am I going to get to the Lake?” So we ask, “Well, ma’am, what did you want to get there for?” That’s dynamite. Did you get hit over the head with a handbag? (laughter) You get letters of objection sent to the supervisor. That just shouldn’t be asked. And out of all that non-quantifiable data, I suppose, there comes John Ricknar’s conviction that they don’t know what they’re coming to the lake for. They don’t know. But when they get there, they get a lot of information given to them by the park. “Hey, any fish in that lake, Ranger?” “Yeah. We dumped a whole tank in last week.” “Oh. Maybe that’s what I came for. To fish. That’s what people do in parks and on weekends.” And it was Ricknar’s conviction that weekend fishing was not the optimal use to which a high alpine lake should be put. You notice the weasel word that I slid in there so smoothly? “Should” “Should!” Man, now there we’re in a different ballgame. We’re not collecting data. We’re not observing what people, in fact, do. But we are prescribing what they ought. And that makes a real difference in how we come at it, doesn’t it? That’s why I put such a premium on fanaticism. It takes a fanatic to be willing to stand up and say, “Sorry, ma’am, you shouldn’t be doing that.” Better get ready to duck. People don’t like to be told what they ought to do. They can figure that out for themselves.

But it’s in the light of that assumption that I would like to make my pitch today. And I base it on an old philosophical quest. It’s the quest for the nature of man. Now, if we could actually come up with a basic nature of what man is, and if we could avoid all the traps of definitional topology, you know, by defining man to be what we secretly wanted him to be all the time; if we could come up with the essential nature in some “objective manner,” – I think we just lost the ballgame but we don’t have to play that game to conclusion – then we would be able to proceed and make decisions on the basis of that analysis. And so that’s what I’d like to try to do, and I’m keenly aware of the gaping holes in my argument. And maybe we can have some discussions on the more obvious ones. Also, as we go along, I’m open to be stopped at any time since I really have no particular place to go. I don’t have a good conclusion prepared. That’ll come to me hopefully sometime. (laughter) But I’ve got a stunning body of material. (laughter)

Okay. I sort of have two basic points in my outline and then as sort of a third corollary, which I’m not sure how it fits. But the two points are the nature of man, which I’ve just mentioned, and the second one is the nature of the wilderness experience, where I would like to analyze it in spiritual terms. That’s all. (laughter) And if I have time, I’ll tell you about the third later.

We are dealing with a scarce commodity, and that haunts me that I’m making economic decisions. It irritates me (laughter) because it’s so right. Well, let’s take a quick pass at primitive man for our purposes. And I have a whole lecture on this. It could be expanded to a whole course. I’m fascinated with primitive man and how he lives in the world and what we have to learn as to how we live in the world. But unless we have a chance to go back and ask more about it, let’s just take a quick look at primitive man’s place in his universe.

And what I’m focusing on for the purposes of our discussion is his feeling of being at home in the universe. For me, that’s going to involve what you can call a “religious dimension”, a feeling of meaning. You drop one of the early Indian tribes down in the North American continent and when he lands in a desert area, in a forest area, there’s an instantly established relationship between

that individual and his surroundings. In the most isolated circumstances, the trees, the rocks, the streams, the sky – you know, we don't have to go through a course in primitive religions to sense his feeling tone. He's at home. And the "at home ness" does not arrive from a scientific analysis of his environment. He doesn't understand the scientific approach. I'm tempted to score off Modi and am hopelessly incapable of resisting it, but the Indian is not figuring the cost benefit analysis, his future course of action. (laughter) He just has a feel for where he fits. And it makes sense. As a part of a very complex value structure, I'd certainly use that terminology, he's at home in the universe and he does it in a religious manner, in a sense passing far beyond what he physically perceives. He assumes meaning to invest his environment.

Well, there's a lot of theories and descriptions as to how this developed among the primitive tribes, and one of the fascinating things to me is to go back and surmise as to how it came about. I even have a fantastic Bill Cosby story that deals with the early astragal phthises, but we don't have time for it. Maybe later.

Anyhow, primitive man is at home in a sacral universe. And when we jump to modern man and whatever else we say about him, he isn't. We're not at home in any sense of the word, and the key phrase – I don't know which discipline it fits – sociology or psychology – being a philosopher, I can ignore all the designations and just pick and choose what interests me because we don't have any discipline ourselves. The phrase I choose is "alienation." We are alienated first of all from ourselves as modern men. Now, what do we mean when we says we're "alienated from ourselves"?

By golly, I can get a little group participation here, because one of the things that irritates me is that I'm put in the position of standing up here in front of you guys and I forgot to mention this that when I look at your absorbed faces with one after another of us experts laying our trip on you (laughter) – there's got to be a better way. My final invidious observation is that – out of what? 6 weeks training program? For national park service – how many nights do you spend out of doors? Come on, quick. Three? Maybe four? Out of 6 weeks?! Well, you know there is something about this wilderness and the feeling man has for it, and maybe we aren't doing it justice. I know, we'll bring Unsoeld in for a 2-hour lecture. That'll take care of it. That irritates me. (laughter) Bring it up with your administration. We're indoors, we're artificialized right out the window, and we should be out the window; out there where it's happening.

Well, I've forgotten my point because I get carried away on these things, but... (laughter) Oh. Group participation.

Alienated from ourselves means, among other things, I suppose, we're "alienated from our bodies." Let me prove it to you. How many people put on underarm deodorant this morning? Let's have a show of hands. (laughter) Get them up high! (laughter) You know, I sweat and I use it because I don't like to alienate you. Let's just once. Up high. Underarm deodorant. Come on! Admit it. (laughter) Gosh. In the park service. That's fascinating. (laughter) I ran this scientific experiment, for which the data is quantifiable, with the Sierra Club and with the Outward Bound conference. And, interesting comparative statistics. As one might have predicted, there were many fewer hands – I'm tempted to plot a curve – the bottom end is the Outward Bound'ers and then just halfway up the scale are the Sierra Club'bers, but you know they're weekender types, and here's the park service, guardians of our wilderness, the heaviest users of underarm deodorant. (laughter) In which I conclude that alienation from OUR bodies is proceeded of pace. And I be whale that. We're ashamed of the smell of sweat. That's a cultural conditioning that we've been sucked into. With all kinds of groovy advertising and operate conditioning and audio receptors – remember, (lowering his voice): B O. Some of you may go back that far. And we just reach for the fix. You got to have it. And it's fairly serious.

In addition to alienation from our bodies, we're alienated from our feelings. From our feelings. Our school system does that pretty effectively. In the classroom, there is no place for emotion. Because we're involved in a cerebral exercise and let's not mix our categories. What happens when a girl

breaks down in tears in the ordinary grade school classroom? What happens? A kid starts crying? "Would you like a drink of water?" That's the first immediate action. And then if she can't control herself, well "Maybe you'd step out in the hall. You're disrupting the class." And so she's isolated in the hall until she gets herself under control. I don't even ask you what happens if a boy...because that doesn't happen. Not in our cultural. We can't even conceive of a boy breaking down in tears in public. We're alienated from our emotions. We're ashamed of them. We do not let them show.

So not only alienation from ourselves but alienation from each other. And we are alienated from each other. There's so much evidence here, you just pick and choose. Kitty Genovese is my favorite, my horrible favorite. Probably many of you have heard Kitty Genovese, some nameless girl in Greenwich Village who was murdered. She was murdered very inefficiently over a period extending up to nearly an hour, and there were, by statistical measurement, 38 witnesses to that murder. One of them heard the proceedings proceeding and opened the window, and the murderer became alarmed and ran off. Looked out the window and saw the bleeding body on the sidewalk and quickly closed the window. Kitty was still alive and dragged herself to the door and was scratching on the door, and pounding on it for help. After 10 minutes the murderer came back and proceeded with his performance, terribly inefficient, and after 45 = 55 minutes of bumbling and stumbling, he managed to pull it off, and she was dead. And the 39th witness picked up the telephone to call the police. No, to call his brother-in-law to ask if he thought he ought to call the police. Come on. That's got to be a sick joke. But it's history. It's what really happened. In a big city like New York, that kind of thing can and does happen.

We're alienated from each other. You can go on to sort of – I see this as an escalating thing. "Man has always been alienated from each other, up to the point of killing him." Killing each other; you know, we do kill each other in war and that sort of thing. By my assessment, war has become more evil today than it used to be. One of the holes in my argument through which you can rumble in a truck. But let me present you the invitation.

The old wars used to be just as bloody. People got just as dead. And I'm not talking in quantifies. You can quantify it, of course; we've gotten more efficient. But I'm talking about something else that made it worse. When you squared off with a lance, you squared off with a sword or a knife or go back to the earliest weapon known to man which, by the archaeological researches, was the radius bone of a middle sized antelope used as a club, that you beat each other on the head with. There's a certain amount of connection – man to man. And I suppose in those days of enlightenment, man to woman and woman to man, too. You didn't mess around with the female of the species either. They're just as apt to beat on you as the male. Which I rate an advantage to the human species. Only by comparison, you can't imagine any other kind of relationship. In order to kill somebody, you have to get pretty intimate. But, of course, no longer.

In the Second World War there was the toggle switch on the joystick and you'd press the switch and the bombs would go down and it became a logistical exercise of conveying the greatest amount of armament to the delivery point, and it could be solved by regular statistics of supply and demand. And today in Vietnam, we've reached the farthest out, the automated battlefield with sensors and automatically dispatched grown attack planes. Anything that moves in that area is obliterated. Anything. And the jokes that grow up around the expenditure of great sums of money to wipe out a water buffalo because we haven't yet progressed far enough to be able to distinguish between water sloshing in the stomach of a water buffalo and water carried for the Viet Cong troops by the water carriers. Now, you know, preferably we want to kill the water carriers and spare the water buffalos. But our technology isn't quite up to it so they both get zapped. Alienated from each other to a degree that one would have thought impossible at one point.

And, finally, we're alienated from nature. I don't know of a better illustration than our present position. You and I right now are so alienated from nature – from what's outside – we're alienated by our artificial lighting, our artificial temperature, and we're in control by the flip of a switch. We adjust our environment. And that alienates us. We fail any longer to take into account the reality in

which we're placed in this world, because we control the reality. I don't know, my favorite story on this one is told by Theodore Rozak. He sets the scene for our ultimate alienation from nature at Old Faithful. Here comes a family - father, mother, 3 kids - filing into the grand stand to watch the eruption of Old Faithful. And they all sit down and it's getting close now. You can tell by that big clock that goes around. Close to the next eruption time. All five disappear behind their cameras. There's one way that you view nature, and that's through a viewfinder. It's almost as if you can't bear the naked reality; you've got to fool with it. And here it comes. It starts. Pssshhhhhhhhh. "Now, Dad, now?" "Naw. Wait, kids, wait. There's a bigger one." Pssshhhhhhhhh. "Oh boy! Now, Dad?" "No. Wait, wait, wait till she really gets up there." Well, you know, even Old Faithful is finitely capable and eventually really tops out, but they're waiting for the biggest. And they don't come labeled. (laughter) And here the next one's not quite as big as the last one. "That's okay, it's just a temporary remission. It's gathering its forces. Now get ready kids." (pause) "Aww, Dad." And it stops. They never click. "Is that all?" They get up and file out with the air of someone who's been gyped; really like their money back. And the final comment is, "Disneyland was better." (laughter) And there's the final alienation from nature. Disneyland IS better. You know just what it's going to do. You know just when to click the shutter. You know the red light goes on and you know to click. We're in control, and we prefer it that way.

Well, I would suggest at this point that the alienation from nature constitutes the key, and I'm declaring it THE key to the other alienations. One of the statements that comes out of this analysis is that "Nature, which (I'll submit to you) includes us, is a seamless robe which we deny by our process of analysis." We say that for our processes, we can pick up a package of Rodale books, it's part of nature, and we can do what we want with it and nobody need be affected by it. There is no necessary connection between Rodale books and (sounds like he drops a stack of books) all the rest of us guys in this room. My assertion is the exact contrary that nature is a seamless robe to a degree FAR beyond that which we are aware of. We're connected. And when you shake any portion of it, the rest trembles.

Now, let me make another specific statement based on that. It's simply that the way we treat things affects how we treat people. And that when we start abusing the physical things of this world, which our culture is BASED on, then the abuse of others follows as automatically as the day follows the night. In this case, the night follows the day. Because we proceed into increasing darkness as the callousness, the lack of respect, progresses with respect to objects, then we begin to objectify people and it becomes purely rational that we should do so and the reason a man takes over and expands upon it.

And the final product of this whole tendency is not only an alienation from ourselves and from each other and from nature, but a total loss of meaning. A total loss of "at home ness" in the universe. A de-sacralization of the universe, which results from our objectification of our entire experience. And if you want a correlative thesis, the evil genius in this process, is science. Science, our great savior. The mindset which is collocated by science. The absolute value placed upon dealing objectively with data. Leads us inevitably down this path, which results in the loss of meaning throughout our entire experience. And this is what makes it religious. Defining religious as anything having to do with that in which we hold ultimate concern. Ultimate concern. What keeps us going? What makes it all worthwhile? The answer to the question, "Why bother at all?" And you know, you can press this. "Well, you bother because of what it's worth to you." In what terms? "Well, money! Money is why you bother." So, you've got money. So what? Why bother? "Well, what it'll get you." Look what it'll get you. Things. People. You can buy anything. You know, and then all the clichés. You can buy anything except peace of mind. Yeah, but it does help. "Okay. So it helps." But it isn't inevitable, and what I'm pushing for is what lies beyond the reach of those kinds of value systems. What gives ultimate overall worthfulness to our continued existence. That's the religious dimension.

Which brings me to my second point. The nature of this religious experience, an actual analysis of it, and maybe I've sold out to the enemy here, it's a scientific process I've engaged upon to analyze

religious experience. It's crazy, man. You can't analyze it. You've got to experience it. But we're stuck in the classroom and all you can do is analyze it there. I've never mastered the ability to "turn a group on", you know. So the wind of the spirit blows through ... a CLASSROOM? I've never experienced it in a church. Well, I don't want to dwell on that. That's a whole other lecture. So we do the undoable and we analyze it. The guy whose stuff I'm cribbing here – because none of this is mine – I pull it out of this book and that and paste it together – this guy's name is Rudolph Otto and he wrote a little classic called *The Idea of the Holy*, in which he tries to analyze the feeling of holiness. And what he's talking about here is our feeling, which is very rare, you know, in our culture. We don't very often encounter it. But once we do, it's fairly unmistakable because it kind of sneaks up and chokes you. When was the last time you said to yourself, "I am in the presence of the sacred." It doesn't happen often. But we remember from what we read about the saints and other non-typical individuals that there are certain characteristics you can use to describe this experience. Otto wound up in Latin and delivered it because Latin is so darned impressive. *Mysterium Tremendum Adphosonosis*. Now how can you say no to that? (laughter) That's just got to shake you. And the analysis starts with the mystery. Whatever the sacred is – and you don't pretend to know all that much about it except how you FEEL it. And you feel it as a mystery. And that means something completely outside your ordinary thought patterns. The Holy Other, as some theologians put it. A hidden ness that you're not familiar with, and that leads directly into another feeling tone that characterizes it – the Germans have a fantastic term for it – the *Oongaporeda* – and that just sort of makes me shiver even to think about it. Even if I understood it. It means the "uncanny." The kind of feeling you get walking past a graveyard. "We don't have feelings walking past graveyards." Well, at midnight. (laughter) October 31! (laughter) We can up the ante. There's a different feeling tone there. I'm very emotional and I can feel the hairs – just back here – they're a little long but down at the roots (laughter), you know, you can just feel them quiver. That's what I'm talking about. And it's part of the mystery. And part of something else.

Mysterium TREMENDUM. A sense of power. Overpowering power. It's there, in the Sacred, and it's scary. The old religions testify to the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. That's gone out of fashion. We don't have much fear of God – at least, not that we really FEEL. But in the presence of a sacred experience, fear is there. It's transmuted into something we call Awe. It's AW-ful. It's that, too. And you kind of tremble before it because this is – it's too much. That's what it is. And you're all shriveled up in awareness of it. And if this is the Sacred; if it's something you don't understand and you're terrified of, what's the percentage in seeking it. The tradition is that man has sought it throughout all the ages. And that's the third phrase.

Mysterium Tremendum Adphosonosis. Fascinating. Which only means, I want it. And I'm scared of it, and I don't want it. But I do want it. There's an ambivalence. You don't just walk in and say, "How much? I'll take a little shot of sacredness today." (laughter) You approach it with true fear and trembling. And the corollary that I draw to this analysis of the sacred is that every single term you use to designate it applies to the wilderness. It just came upon me. This is my little creative contribution. The wilderness is mysterious, by definition, which I hate to say because Modi used it all the time and my philosophical hackles went up. "They can define anything." But it's a good term, and I'll share it with you. By definition, the wilderness is mysterious. You don't understand it. What's going on here.

I remember a phrase in Edward Abby's book *Desert Solitaire*. Old Ed Abby sitting in his park service trailer, drinking his beer, staring at the rocks. What do these rocks mean? Come on, What does a rock mean? There's no pictograph on it is there? No. What's the meaning of their very "is-ness"? And I respect Ed Abby. I've never met him. I don't know him. I'm dropping his name because I read his book. But he was honest. He wouldn't jazz it up the way I tend to. Because I'll invent a meaning if I can't find it. He wouldn't. He insisted that it come from the rocks. And he was sort of wistful. He never found it. But the very fact he asks the question, you know, points to the mystery of there being anything rather than nothing. There is a mystery there.

personal account now – in my experience, there is totality, a sense of all-ness, it's sort of kaleidoscope. Goings on. But remember not you witnessing it because you're gone. But it's happening. It's oceanic, and one other thing. It's bliss. It is joy. And that's all there is. I told you I shouldn't have tried it. But it gives you the essence of the answer to the question, why anything rather than nothing. Why bother? Why put up with cost benefit analyses? And the answer – the only answer – the final answer – is joy, to which there is no value attached because it IS value. It's incommensurable.

And I guess at that point, I have to do another experiment because I don't want to leave you with a mistaken impression. That'd be the place to cut it off. But in all honesty, I have another question to ask as to the ultimate aim of the National Park Service.

One thing is, if the purpose of the National Parks is the preservation of wilderness because of the intrinsic worth of wilderness itself, then you follow one line. And to me this might seem the purest line. Wilderness for wildernesses sake. The other possibility is wilderness for the sake of man. Now, what's the distinction between these two possibilities? Just before I provide, this came to me in a talk I gave to the Sierra Club, a bunch of outdoor educators. And it suddenly struck me, we could check this out. And for the purposes of the experiment, all you have to imagine for a moment is that you are divine, you are the traditional creator, God, and - we're moving so fast, just go ahead and assume it for a moment, ok for the sake of argument. I know there are some hurdles along the way – blasphemy and those sort of things (laughter) – but as an intellectual experiment, just imagine yourself rearing back for a miracle and you're going to create either of two objects. You're either going to create the earth and all that's on it – just as we know it today – EVERYTHING – Albright Training Center, ranger badges, the whole works – blondes, brunettes, redheads – EVERYthing – and you're going to create that in one burst. That's alternative one. Or alternative two is you're going to create EVERYthing that's on earth today – the whole ball of wax – EXCEPT man. No men. All the animals, the fishes, the birds, but no men. That's alternative number two. Now, can we have a show of hands – you've been given the chance to assess the two alternatives – can we have a show of hands of those who would create number one. Shall we see those hands? That's the whole world including man. Including man. (pause) OK. I know it's fast and I wish we had more time to think about it, but let's see it for number two. All nature WITHOUT man. If you had your druthers. By George, I'm impressed. You know, that's very very interesting. The Sierra Club'bers came up madder than hornets afterwards. One of them said, "Willi, that's too important a decision to make on such short notice." (laughter) But I think it's a really relevant question to ask because it lets us know where our priorities lie. And, let me give you my vote. (pause) Emotionally, I'm a number two'er. I would really like to be able to vote with you guys, but if I'm going to be honest, I can't. I just got to fly to the human species. That's where my values come down. And it'd be easier if it weren't that way because all I'd have to do is design a method for extermination, you know, and I could realize my ultimate. But I can't do that. I'm hooked on mankind.

And, so my final test of this wilderness test that we've just been through together – my final test of its efficacy – you know, because having been there in the mountains, alone, in the midst of solitude, and this feeling, this mystical feeling, if you feel, of the ultimacy of joy and whatever there is, the question is - I've never felt it in the city, incidentally – and that's a whole other kick. And so the question is Why not stay out there in the wilderness the rest of your days? And just live in the lap of sautori, or whatever you want to call it. And the answer – MY answer – to that is because that's not where men are. And the final test for me and for the legitimacy of the experience is, how well it enables you to cope with the problems of mankind when you come back to the city. And now you see how this phases with the role of the National Parks? It's a renewal exercise, and as I visualize it, it leads to a process of alternation. That you come to the parks for your metaphysical fix, your reassurance that the world makes sense. It's a reassurance that I don't get in the city. But with that excess of confidence, of reassurance that there's something behind it all and it's good, you come back to where men are – to where men are messing things up – because men tend to – and you come back with a new ability to relate to yourself and to your fellow man and to help your

fellow man to relate to each other. And that's the kind of alternation which I see is crucial for the national parks to contribute to.
(applause)