



Michael and his wife June, 2013

Michael Soulé,

Although he would cringe to hear me admit it, Michael Soulé to me remains the Wizard, not of Oz, perhaps from Middle Earth, but definitely born from the cauldron we call Wild Nature. His scholarly writings and unapologetic activism gave us assurance of the rightfulness—yes, righteousness—of a purpose grounded in science, humility and respect, and love for creatures great and small. On this matter, Michael was clear:

I have always loved, and will always love, wild nature: Plants and animals. Places that are still intact. Though others might avoid the word, I insist that we talk about “love” in conservation, because we only protect what we love.

Eight years or so ago, I was unexpectedly summoned to make a champagne toast to the Man. I was well aware of his formidable, fierce intellect. Earlier, I learned of Michael’s Zen Buddhist roots and his friendship with and admiration for Arne Næss, a Norwegian philosopher who introduced the term "deep ecology." Deep ecology is the philosophy embracing the understanding of the inherent worth of living beings regardless of their instrumental utility to human needs.

At that awkward moment and through no fault of my own, Chögyam Trungpa’s *Sacred Path of the Warrior* immediately came to mind. Since my own warrior

experience consisted of two Vietnam deployments as a Navy SEAL that felt anything but sacred, I read with interest Trungpa’s non-violent, Buddhist ode intertwining intellectual and spiritual fearlessness with the “genuine heart of sadness.” Sitting in front of me, smiling as only Soulé can, I thought then said “Michael is both a brave heart and a tender heart, which is something I aspire to. I’m proud to call him a friend. He’s the father of conservation biology, but a lot more.”^[1] Hardly brilliant, but better than I expected.

Considered the “father of conservation biology”, Michael co-founded the Society for Conservation Biology in 1985, and also served as its first president. He also co-founded The Wildlands Project (later evolving into Wildlands Network) and serve as its president. He wrote and edited nine books on biology, conservation biology, and the social and policy context of conservation, and published more than 170 articles on population and evolutionary biology, fluctuating asymmetry, population genetics, island biogeography, environmental studies, biodiversity policy, nature conservation, and ethics.

Michael’s lady companion, June, and his many friends survive and miss him as again we are reminded that we all share this small planet, cherish all that we hold dear, and that we are all mortal.^[2]



Kim Crumbo
Ogden, Utah June 2020

^[1] Mary Ellen Hannibal’s account of the event in *The Spine of the Continent*, 2012, page 246.

^[2] “So, let us not be blind to our differences—but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.” JFK, 1963.

From Kim Vacariu:

A letter to Michael Soule´

Dear Michael,

While the accolades due you for your multitude of groundbreaking conservation “inventions” will be detailed in the annals of nature protection forever, there is one aspect of your work that may not be as easily recognized as one of your greatest achievements. In a movement that excels in science yet struggles to overcome the obstacles of effectively explaining it to regular people (animals, as you have noted, need no explanations), you were, and frankly still are, King of Conservation Communications.

The moment I met you in 1998 is a moment that still rings like a bell in my thoughts. You had stopped by the Wildlands Project office in Tucson to see who was foolhardy enough to take on the job of Communications Director for an organization that, thanks to your deft philosophies, was the object of brutal defamation by those who feared nature protection was the end of human dominance of Earth. You stood in front of my desk, arms folded, to give me your unbridled prescription for what was to come.

“Are you sure you want to have a career in such a thankless profession?” you asked, tongue-in-cheek, but scaring the hell out of this neophyte. “You are one brave soul.”

Not long after that, you coined the phrase that made me realize communicating science could actually become a promising endeavor.

“Networks of People Protecting Networks of Land” was your hallmark phrase, and even though it merely preceded the rest of your uncanny linguistic deity to come (Cores, Carnivores, Connectivity, etc.) it became my mantra and guiding star to understanding what had to be done. I will carry your love and inspiration forward as long as I have breath to speak.

With gratefulness and happiness,
Kim Vacariu, Rodeo, New Mexico, June 2020

