# LAUCKS FOUNDATION

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As a public service, Laucks Foundation calls attention to published material that might contribute toward clarification of issues affecting world peace, equity among peoples and environmental responsiblity.

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**"Never in our history have we faced so profound a need for a policy based on a sense of conscience."**

**- David McReynolds**

**"The percentage of children who have frequent exposure to wildlands and to other, undomesticated species is smaller than ever before in human history."**

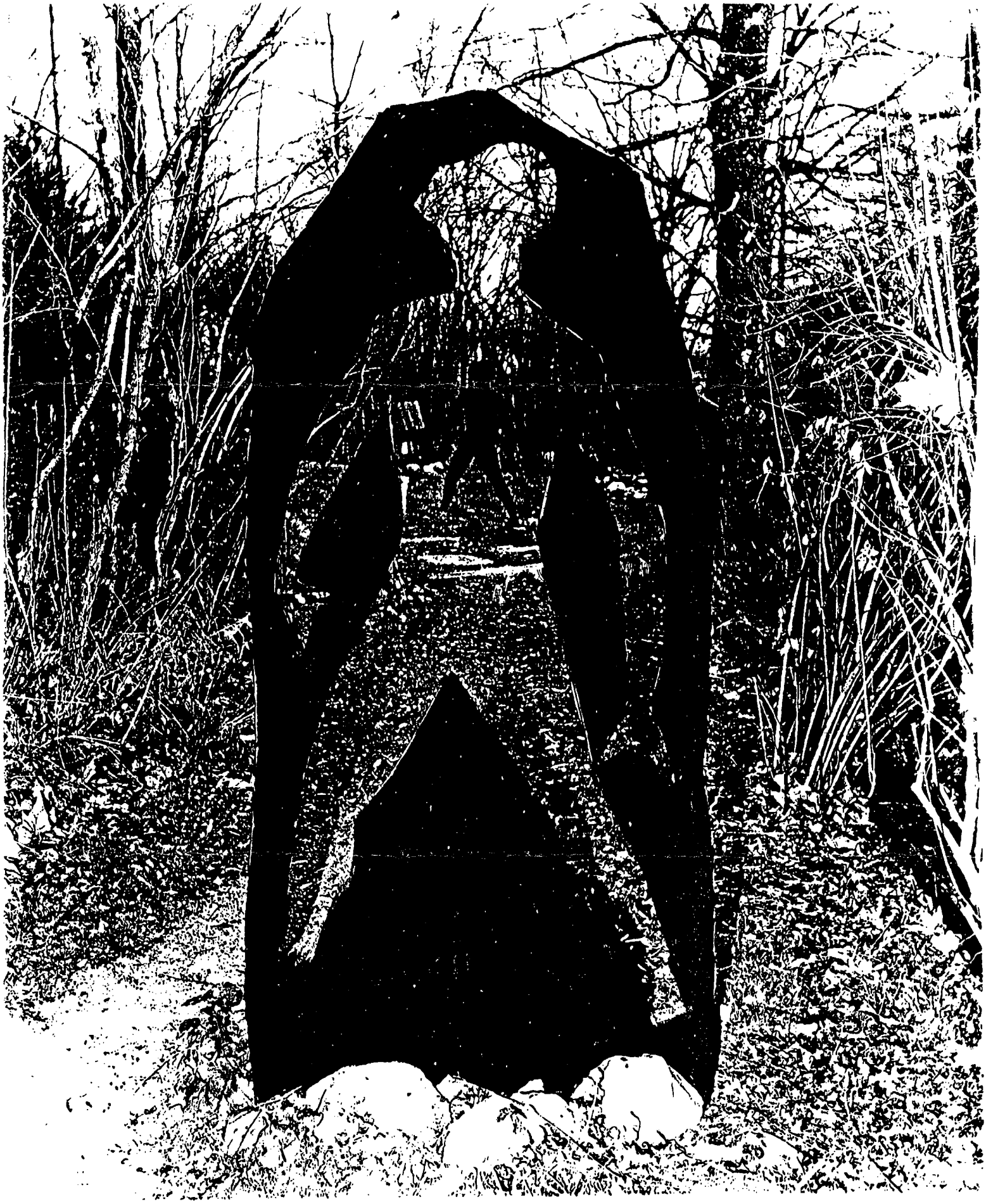
**- Gary Paul Nabhan**

# The Unkillable Human

## by Frederick Franck

*In Hiroshima, burned into a concrete wall I saw the shadow of a fellow human, evaporated the moment the bomb struck. Returned home, haunted by this image, I took this steel plate and with a blowtorch cut out the contour of this mutilated victim. When the contour was complete, the human shape fell out. Then I placed both components some 20 feet apart so that through the hollow negative, surrounded by flames of steel, the Unkillable Human could be seen rising like a phoenix from its ashes.*

[Permission to reprint granted by Dr. Frederick Franck]



Frederick Franck: **The Unkillable Human**
Original: Pacem in Terris, Warwick, N.Y. Replicas: Pennsylvania State U.; Nanzan U., Nagoya, Japan; Cathedral of St. John the Divine. N.Y.; Peace Garden, Harrisburg, PA.

# Reflections on the Half Century

by

David McReynolds*

**The year 1995 will mark 50 years since:**

**> the world entered the nuclear age with the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki**

**> the end of the Second World War**

**> the end of the systematic destruction of people in the Holocaust**

**> the founding of the United Nations**

During and since that time we have lived through such a nightmare of nuclear terror - a madness that defies quiet comprehension - that it is possible to forget the reality of World War II.

The nuclear bomb did introduce a new element into war - qualitatively different from Nobel's dynamite. Here is a force that does more than shatter the solid rocks in a wall - it vaporizes them. It does more than give us a generation of orphans and widows - it infects our genes with mutations.

Yet nuclear war is no more than an emphatic exclamation mark at the end of a period of history - for if we do not use these weapons, the alternatives at hand include biological and bacteriological weapons fully as fearful. To focus on nuclear weapons is logical - but to focus only on them, their testing, proliferation, their ultimate outlawing, is at best to make the world safe for Vietnams, Afghanistans, Bosnias, etc. It is to forget that since the end of World War II more lives were lost in "conventional" wars than in that last great international act of fratricide in which an estimated 45 million people died.

[* for War Resisters League, 339 Lafayette St., NY, NY 10012; (212)228-0450. 

To focus primarily on the technical problems of the nuclear age (profoundly complex as they are) is to overlook something we yearn to overlook - the element of insanity which has threatened, all this century, to bring our history to an end. In this sense, the Holocaust is as important as Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We just look at what we have done to ourselves, and realize that something more than some form of world government, or some technical fix is needed.

It is here the religious community is needed. I am mindful that too many of our crimes of war stem from religious passions (Bosnia being the current example). What I am concerned with is the need to view our situation with awe, with a biblical "fear and trembling" that will lead us to some awareness that while political solutions are essential, so, too, is personal moral responsibility. Never in our history have we faced so profound a need for a politics based on a sense of conscience.

It is in this sense that the fiftieth year is an occasion for pause and renewal. A time to remember not only those who died in the last war, but all those who have been broken by wars in the years since, and whose deaths mock the promises we had made to one another in 1945 when the peoples of the world realized what we had done, and pledged it would never be done again.

I was a high school student when war ended. I remember the hope with which we greeted the peace, the consensus among political leaders that what we wanted went far beyond outlawing nuclear weapons (at that time there were few such weapons, all of them in the hands of the U.S.) What was agreed upon as a legitimate and reasonable political goal was total disarmament. True, that agreement was brief, and it was not, in many cases, sincere. But it so profoundly reflected the hopes of the human family that it acted as a restraint on governments.

It is this which should be lifted up in 1995 - the demand we make of our governments and of ourselves individually that we be done with war, that we move to end nuclear proliferation and testing, of course, but also against the possession of such weapons by any nation. That we continue to move against the trade in arms at any level by any nation. That we proceed steadily and relentlessly to scale down the size of all military forces. That we truly think of a world without armies as we know them. That we understand this will mean a continuing combination of thoughtful political work and international

legal frameworks, but also the work of individuals, of citizens' movements reaching across boundaries, of work outside the framework of governments.

I do not think pacifists or the religious peace community have all the answers, but we are an essential part of the answer. And that it is necessary for us to talk together, and plan together so that 1995 will be a time for a lifting of consciousness so profound that in the context of our demands the issue of getting rid of nuclear weapons will seem a reasonable first step rather than a revolutionary final act.

There will be many events in 1995. Fifty years since the Bomb. Fifty years since the end of World War II. Fifty years since the UN was established. Fifty years since the Holocaust ended. There is room for many themes to be developed. Some of those - such as the founding of the UN - run the risk of being self-congratulatory. There may be a temptation to settle for practicality - to hope for a comprehensive test ban treaty as if that was the best we could wrest from the ashes of all our hopes.

Can we not, those of us who hold to a certain witness of conscience, set such a fire under our governments that they may be provoked into trying to quench our fire by limited steps, which in turn may give us the strength to be unbounded in our demand for what now is surely the impossible dream: the end of war - not the end of humanity.

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*(The following is an excerpt from Robert Maynard Hutchins' farewell address to the students of the University of Chicago, as he left his post as Chancellor in 1951)*

"The goal toward which all history tends is peace, not peace through the medium of war, not peace through a process of universal intimidation, not peace through a program of mutual impoverishment, not peace by any means that leaves the world too frightened or too weak to go on fighting, but peace pure and simple, based on that will to peace which has animated the overwhelming majority of mankind through countless ages. This will to peace does not arise out of a cowardly desire to preserve one's life and property, but out of a conviction that the fullest development of the highest powers of men can be achieved only in a world at peace."

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[Permission to reprint
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the Seedhead News

# Children in Touch, Creatures in Story

By Gary Paul Nabhan

The playful exploration of habitat by cohorts of children—as well as the gradual accumulation of an oral tradition about the land—have been essential to child development for over a million years, as the emergence of language allowed the telling of stories and an expression of kinships with the earth. Through such informal means, tens of thousands of generations of children have become ecologically literate about their home ground. They have gradually learned hundreds of specific guidelines and rules about how to respond to particular plants and animals, not only the ones with which they had frequent contact, but seldom seen, mythic ones as well. The qualities of firewoods, the songs of birds, the identities of floral fragrances and mammalian musks have all filtered into their consciousness....

There are still many children in this world who live where they have primary contact with wild nature; who still hear the old stories; and who have uncles and grandfathers or grandmothers and aunts to guide them through their gender's rites of passage. Yet the percentage of children who have frequent exposure to wildlands and to other, undomesticated species is smaller than ever before in human history....

Fundamental to this cultural loss is the phenomenon Robert Michael Pyle has termed "the extinction of experience," or the termination of direct, frequent contact between children and wildlife. While many children may visit zoos, watch nature films, or cuddle with pets and stuffed animals, their responses to other species have become more "politically correct" but less grounded on their own visceral experiences....

We (Gary and Sara St. Antoine, an accomplished writer of children's novels and environmental education curricula—*ed.*) interviewed fifty-two Anglo, Hispanic, O'odham, and Yoeme (Yaqui/Mayo) children between eight and fourteen years of age during the summer of 1992 in towns such as Sonoyta and Quitovac, Sonora, and Ajo, Avra Valley, and Marana, Arizona.... The vast majority of the children were now gaining most of their knowledge about other organisms vicariously. The trends were staggering: 77 percent of the Mexican kids, 61 percent of the Anglo, 60 percent of the Yaqui, and 35 percent of the O'odham kids felt that they had seen more animals on television and in movies than they had personally seen in the wild. These local trends mirror results from a 1992 survey of fifth and sixth graders in the United States, in which 53 percent of the children listed the media as their primary

*(continued on next page)*

teacher about the environment; 31 percent reported that they learned more about the environment from school, and only 9 per cent claimed they obtained most of their environmental information at home and in the wild.

Roughly half of the children felt that they now learn more about the desert flora and wildlife from books than from their elders. Alvron, a Mexican-American boy from a small Arizona town, epitomizes the modern dilemma. When asked whether his family or his books were the primary source of what he knew about animals, his answer was immediate: "Neither. The Discover Channel!"...

> The percentage of children who have frequent exposure to wildlands and to other, undomesticated species is smaller than ever before in human history....

The kind of solitude in nature that historically instilled a sense of wonder in many incipient naturalists was shared only by a few of the kids. Their lack of solitude made us curious about other outdoor activities that kids often do together, pursuits that may lead a child into later study of natural history: the casual collection of feathers, bones, butterflies, and beautiful stones.... Again, we were surprised that a significant percentage of kids today are not collecting, carrying around, or keeping such natural treasures....

What most disturbed us was that many kids know few of the basic facts about the desert that can only be learned first-hand and not through the media. Some of these failures would have been unimaginable a century ago: for example, 55 percent of the Mexican kids didn't know you can eat prickly pear fruit, a food that has been a staple in northern Mexico for more than eight thousand years. Roughly a quarter of the Indian kids weren't sure whether the aromatic creosote bush, known to them as "greasewood," smelled stronger after rains than cactus did, even though older generations of Indians claimed that creosote gave their homeland its distinctive smell. Nearly a fifth of all kids interviewed could not recall that desert birds sing more actively early in the morning than at midday.

Perhaps these figures are not so unexpected, considering that over 60 percent of the children we talked with say that they learn more about plants and animals at school than at home.... Yet classroom, museum, and park education programs are not the problem; they simply can't enrich kids who don't have much personal experience in nature on which to build....Most desert children claim that they have learned more about plants and animals from school than their grandparents had learned their entire lives....I was especially saddened to learn that 58 percent of the O'odham and 60 percent of the Yaqui kids felt this way, because their grandparents have taught me the most valuable information about the desert I know....I was most struck by the idea that all the detailed knowledge of the plants and animals held by Indian elders was not considered valuable exactly because it was *not* book learning!

Our world today is one in which we are losing ways of speaking about plants and animals as rapidly as we are losing endangered species themselves. Oral traditions about plants, animals, treacherous waters, and complex topography depend upon specific vocabularies that encode particularities which may not be recognized in the lexicons of the commonly spoken, widespread languages. As half of the two hundred native languages in North America die when their last elder speakers fall silent, thousands of Indian children will have forfeited the chance to speak of their plant and animal neighbors in ways filled with the nuances of feeling that characterized their forebears' speech.

Native American poet-linguist Nora Dauenhauer has reminded us that language extinction is "forever," just as much as the loss of species is irrevocable: "If a Native American language dies, there is no place on earth one can travel to learn it. The public statements that some school administrators continue to make in opposition to teaching native languages would not be tolerated if made about some endangered species of bird or snail."...

Part of what once made my O'odham and Yaqui-Mayo neighbors unique is that their food as well as their stories were all in some way derived from the desert. No wonder the Tohono O'odham tribe of southern Arizona refers to itself in English simply as "the Desert People;" their very blood, muscles, and minds were literally made of molecules from desert seeds, desert meat, desert earth. Today, however, their molecules have nearly the same elements in them as mine: beef from Monfort's feedlots in Colorado; winter

> Most desert children claim that they have learned more about plants and animals from school than their grandparents had learned their entire lives....I was saddened...because their grandparents have taught me the most valuable information about the desert I know.

apples shipped from Puerto Montt in Chile; potatoes mass-produced by a Mormon millionaire in Idaho....

If fables about animals are forgotten, it does not necessarily follow that the animals themselves cease to exist. Nevertheless, as floral and faunal narratives play less of a role in keeping us alert to the fate of other biota, we are more likely to let their existence slip through our fingers without ever noticing this loss.

I had been asked to introduce a Phoenix filming team to the famous O'odham educator Laura Kerman, who has for years taught Indian, Anglo, and Mexican children about desert gardening and gathering traditions in school, park, and museum settings. Laura sometimes has difficulty hearing and getting around—she was in her late eighties—so I decided to go along with the filming team in case Laura requested my assistance.

When it came time to turn the cameras on, a bouncy

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Children in Touch, Creatures in Story

*(continued from page 2)*

**A time when desert children had the whole picture. A Tohono O'odham baby sleeps in his mother's burden basket in 1888.** *Photo by Leo Goldschmidt. Used with kind permission of the Arizona Historical Society/Tucson, Accession Number 46708.*

blonde news celebrity appeared out of the remote broadcasting van, wearing fresh make-up and looking for a picturesque setting in which to situate Laura, who had her gray hair tied back with a big ribbon, and a lovely old full-length skirt on. The newscaster decided they should stroll around the garden which Laura and her brother have tended for decades. The news director signaled for the cameras to roll.

"Well, Laura, you and the other elders out here on the reservation have made your living from the desert for a long time, gardening and gathering wild plants.... Tell me, why do you think the younger generation is not keeping up these traditions."

Laura listened, stopped dead in her tracks, unloosened her arm, and pointed straight at the camera, frowning: "*It's that TV!* They're all watching *that TV!* They just sit around in front of it, they hardly go outside anymore, so how can they plow or plant or gather the fruit? That's the problem, *right there!*"

Her outstretched arm wavered as she pointed at the camera running in front of her. As the newscaster graciously laughed at the good joke played upon her and her television audience—the sequence was run, uncut and uncensored that same week—I noticed that Laura had not been the only one trembling. The man behind the camera itself was shaking. Whatever skill and habitual concentration he had brought to his work, the reminder that his viewfinder trains us to see so little of the world seemed to have shaken his confidence in what he was doing.

Neither the newscaster nor the cameraman are culprits so much as they are unwilling accomplices to a crime larger than that any TV news show could ever cover. It is a crime of deception —convincing people that their own visceral experience of the world hardly matters, and that predigested images hold more truth and power than the simplest, time-tried oral tradition. We need to return to learning about the land by being *on* the land, or better, by being *in* the thick of it. That is the best way we can stay in touch with the fates of its creatures, its indigenous cultures, its earthbound wisdom. That is the best way we can be in touch with ourselves.

*—Excerpted with permission from their beautiful new book of essays,* The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Places, *by Gary Paul Nabhan and Stephen Trimble (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994)*


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