



## Resurrecting the Storytelling Ape

*As we change the way we look at things, the things we look at change.*

By David Weintraub



Carl Safina, New York Times bestselling author and wildlife ecologist believes that humans should be called *homo narratus* instead of *homo sapiens*, the storytelling ape, because stories play a central role in our lives. Thousands of years ago, those stories were told around the sacred fire, later on the back porch. Today they're told on YouTube, Instagram and Tic Toc but missing the context, communal connections and the face-to-face intimacy. They were shared by elders, helping us learn our place in the world, a cornerstone of human civilization for thousands of years.

Those old stories entertained, taught us lessons, helped us feel connected to our ancestors, placed us within the great chain of history, and put our lives in context with the rest of the living world. Native people understood that nature meant for everything to be connected and they lived their lives with the knowledge that anything that was taken, had to be given back or the world would be out of balance. *Dyukta*, following the right path, was an essential part of native life and likely was a part of *every* cultural journey, before we lost our way.

Fast forward 100,000 years and we find ourselves at a critical turning point. Our Western thought centers on use and extraction of resources without paying any attention to replacement and restoration resulting in depletion and ultimately loss. Stewardship was the bedrock of most civilizations including Appalachian culture. But no longer. Today, we tell ourselves a new story that the world revolves around us.

Consumerism has been elevated to a new religion. We need not worry about mass extinctions so long as we get one day shipping. Our new mantra: shut up and buy.

Years ago, technology was supposed to be our friend. I had dreams of life as the Jetsons (the old futuristic cartoon) traveling with my jetpack, beaming to my meetings, having free time to slow down and smell the roses. What happened to that? Instead of technology making our lives easier, it's become our own worst enemy. It spies on our every move, it manipulates our mind, it pits us against each other and its devices become a waste product that contains forever chemicals that poison our environment.

So, where do we go from here? Perhaps two steps backwards. For me, it's putting away my devices and not letting them rule my life. The smarter the devices, the dumber we seem to become. As often as I can, I choose separating myself from digital reality and immersing myself in the living world. Walking in nature, spending time by a stream, sitting atop a mountain, infusing myself with the sounds, tastes, smells of our natural heritage is the perfect cleanser for the overwhelming, dazed and confused feeling that too much technology, too much noise and too much busy-ness causes. We often don't realize how much harm these distractions cause until we separate ourselves from them. The result: the healing of our mind, body and spirit is incalculable.

My new film will focus on this theme – Nature's Wisdom Thru Native Eyes told through stories and the wisdom of our elders. It will contrast the stories that nature tells us with those that society convinces us are true. Relearning healing wisdom that native culture and nature's wisdom teaches could be one way we heal ourselves and our planet. Want to help me make this film? Consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Center for Cultural Preservation and be in the film credits! Contribute at [SaveCulture.org](http://SaveCulture.org)

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