PODCAST TRANSCRIPT
S6E10: BUILDING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS WITH PARKER MCMULLEN BUSHMAN

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Parker McMullen Bushman: Once our most vulnerable communities are wiped out, they're coming for you next. Like, the pollution is gonna spread, the environmental stuff is gonna spread, the social justice stuff is gonna spread. It never just stays with those most vulnerable communities. But, I think people feel like if they, they can be sacrificed. And, I think a lot of people choose to disconnect. It's not even a conscious thing, you know, they're just, kind of, disconnecting from it because it is, it can be really overwhelming.

Sam Fuqua: That's Parker McMullen Bushman, and this is, Well, That Went Sideways! A podcast that serves as a resource to help people have healthy, respectful communication. We present a diversity of ideas, tools, and techniques to help you transform conflict in relationships of all kinds. In this episode, we talk with Parker McMullen Bushman about environmental justice and building a more inclusive environmental movement. They're the CEO of Ecoinclusive Strategies, which serves environmental organizations and other nonprofit and education groups. Parker McMullen Bushman's work focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and helping organizations cultivate cultures where all individuals can thrive.

I'm Sam Fuqua, co-host of the program with Alexis Miles. Hi Alexis.

Alexis Miles: Hi Sam.

Sam Fuqua: And, we're so pleased to be joined for this episode of Well, That Went Sideways! by Parker McMullen Bushman. Hello.

Parker McMullen Bushman: Hi.

Sam Fuqua: It's great to talk with you. We just, uh, gave listeners a little bit in the introduction about your work with Ecoinclusive Strategies. Uh, I understand you work with a lot of environmental groups. What is the, some of the most common things you have to help them with? Common problems.

Parker McMullen Bushman: Yeah, a lot of what I work with my groups on is around environmental justice and, kind of, inclusion and DEI, uh, efforts within the work that they do. And, a lot of times when I say that I work in, uh, DEI in the conservation and environmental realm, people are survi, uh, surprised by it, you know. They're like, what are you trying to say? Are the trees racist? Or, like, you know, what do you mean? And so, I think a lot of my work and some of the most important things that I help orgs do is, like, understand how systems of oppression impact the work that they do, and are deeply embedded into, uh, the conservation movement and environmental movement in ways that are direct. There's, like, direct one-to-one correlations.

Sam Fuqua: So, if I put myself in the room there, where you're trying to help an organization with this work, say more about what you're hearing.

Parker McMullen Bushman: Yeah. You know, it, it's really interesting because the, the roots of the conservation movement, right, is really heavily, um, embedded in, uh, systems around racism, systems around sexism, like, all, all of these things, and, you know, a lot of times people don't know that. Like, when you look around, I've been in this industry for t-, over 25 years, and when I first started out, you know, I was always the only fat, black, queer person, non-binary person, in this space. Like, my identities just were not represented in any other, uh, any of the people that I worked with. It's gotten a little bit better. But, when people look at, um, who's involved in outdoor recreation, when they look at who's involved in environmental work and caring for the planet, you know, and they see the disparities, they, kind of, make up stories that aren't really related to why we have those disparities. So, they say things like, oh, like, black people don't like getting outside, and, you know, this isn't, this is, like, you know, tough, rough and tumble work. And so, like, women and femmes or whatever may not be as, more represented just because it's man's work. Like, all of these different stories that society has made up to, kind of, hide the roots of this work.

So, when I get into the room, I like to back up things with data. And, a lot of my work is helping people to understand the bigger systems and have an understanding of how we got here because, um, that's not something that they really see or dive into every day. And sometimes, there is a lot of resistance to it, you know, because it shifts people's whole view of the work that they do. Like, when they learn about someone like Madison Grant, who was, uh, called one of the fathers of the environmental movement, and, you know, was prolific in helping to save lots of different wildlife, helped to found Denali National Park, uh, was one of the founders of the Save the Redwoods League, right? And also, was a huge eugenicist and wrote a book called *The Passing of the Great Race* where he, um, you can see very closely linked his, his racism linked with his conservation, you know. He wrote about the redwood trees. He thought of them as a superior tree that needed to be, uh, saved, that just like the white race, that was a superior race. And, he wrote this whole book that was lauded by people like Teddy Roosevelt, who's also known as our, like, conservation president, right? Thought the book was really great.

The other person who thought the book was really great was Adolf Hitler, and said that he used it as a, a part of his, like, roadmap for the, the things he did in Germany. And so, like, a lot of people don't know that history. They don't understand the history of, uh, segregation and Jim Crow. That meant that, you know, while we were building America's best idea, the National Parks, that there were whole groups of people that couldn't access these spaces. You know, I think about my father who was born in 1950, and Jim Crow didn't end until 1965. He grew up in the south. Um, he told, he tells, told me stories about picking cotton as a kid, and getting a little bit of money in order to buy a milk and a chicken to take home and feed his family, as, like, a five-year-old. And, you know, he never learned to swim because the pools, right, were segregated. And, uh, so he didn't get that opportunity. He never taught me how to swim. Uh, in the segregated south, he did, never went to a national park or a, um, state park. We had separate but equal. And, a lot of park superintendents would get the money to build this other side, but they would say, like, oh, we need to see if, like, black people even wanna be outdoors. Like, why would we build this if they don't, wouldn't wanna be here? And, they would take the lack of black people trying to get into a space they knew was not built for them, and that they would get in trouble if they want as proof that they didn't need to build these extra facilities for black people.

And so, a lot of times there weren't even those facilities offered, so my dad never went. So, it's no wonder that as I grew up, he didn't introduce me to those things because he didn't have those experiences, right? But, we tell, like, stories that, oh, black people don't like to swim. They're afraid of the water. Or black people don't like the outdoors. And, we have this history of, like, exclusion and lack of access that leads to where we currently are. And so, people don't understand 'cause they're trying to fix a symptom of a bigger system, and helping people to understand that can sometimes be an, sometimes it's an easier journey than others, but sometimes it's a, it can be a really hard journey for people to get to that understanding.

Alexis Miles: Parker, I think of myself as a fairly well-educated person, and I didn't know that history. I did not know that. And, of course, I grew up hearing the mythology of black people can't swim. Our bodies are structured differently.

Parker McMullen Bushman: Yeah.

Alexis Miles: We have longer, leaner muscles. You know, all of that. As you do the work that you do, it sounds like a big component, a big part is education.

Parker McMullen Bushman: Yes.

Alexis Miles: And, and can you name some other ways that our systemic oppressions, racism, sexism, impact the environmental movement?

Parker McMullen Bushman: Oh yeah. Y'all, this is like my favorite topics. I know, I don't know how long your podcast is, but, yes. Um, here in Denver, I think there are some really, uh, very clear lines of connection that you can see. But, I wanna tell a little bit of history, um, before I talk about the modern day 'cause environmental justice is really important to me, right? And so, we had back in, uh, like the 1930s, you know, when we had things like redlining happening because, you know, slavery, slavery was over. Um, you know, and they were looking for new ways to, like, separate people, honestly. You know, we had, in the south, there was Jim Crow and segregation. Um, however, like, we think of, like, places in the west and in the north as being, like, oh, these were the safe places for people to go, and to travel to, but honestly, they, they were not. And, in some ways they were even more dangerous because in the south, it would be, like, very clear, like, this is a sundown town. There'd be a sign, like, get your black behind outta here before sundown. And, like, people understood because it was marked where they could and could not go.

Um, here in Colorado, we were a state where segregation was not legal. However, it was still practiced. And so, we were like a hotbed for the KKK. There's lots of documented instances of black people being turned away from Rocky Mountain National Park. Uh, back during that time, we had Lincoln Hills here, which was one of the only black outdoor resorts west of the Mississippi. And so, people would travel from all over the United States to try and get here to be in the outdoors, right? But that journey could be very arduous if you are traveling through the north and through the west, because things were not labeled. And so, that's also why we had the green book, uh, or the Negro Motorist Guide because as black people got more money and started to be able to have cars and travel, they needed to understand safety and, like, the rules of

the road. Things like, if there was a white motorist coming up behind you, you were supposed to pull off the road and let them pass you, right? And so, like, the Green Book would tell people those things. It would also tell them the safe places that they, uh, could go to.

So, during this time people were moving out of the south, you know. During The Great Migration, my family moved out of Georgia and South Carolina up to New York. But people moved. Um, there's, like, these patterns of where black people moved out of the south into these cities. And, these places that were supposed to be more progressive, some of 'em had, you know, even laws that said they could not, you know, segregation was illegal. They figured out other ways around it, and redlining was one of them, right? And so, during redlining, uh, the Federal Housing Administration actually drew up maps of, uh, the United States, and said in these certain towns, they told banks to not invest, not to, uh, give loans in these certain areas. And, the areas that they said not to give loans were, um, areas where they said Negro, foreign born and low grade populations. And, it was actually written in it, right, codified that they would not, um, give the resources needed to build up in those areas. And so, like, we had several redlined neighborhoods here in Denver, um, like Five Points, Montbello, uh, Globeville, Elyria-Swansea area.

And, in those areas, because they weren't investing in those areas, they became, kind of, deserts for resources. So, people lived there, but they wouldn't have, like, access to a lot of food. Like, they couldn't, like, someone couldn't come in and build a grocery 'cause, like, the bank wouldn't help them. And so, you know, we flash forward from those times, um, we have food deserts, right? We also have big environmental issues because during that time, when industries would come to town, um, people in the redlined areas would get doubly messed up by the government. Um, but because, uh, not only were they redlined, but then zoning officials, if industries came in, zoning officials would say, oh, you can put your factory or your thing over here. There's a lot of space. Those people are poor. They need jobs. You know, so put these things here. So, during that same time of redlining here in Colorado, we got the state's only oil refinery, Suncor, and that got put in Globeville, a redlined area. And, we fast forward to today and that area, if we look at, like, Denver's the same town, right? Um, but we look at the very different neighborhoods 'cause Globeville on average has, um, in some places a two percent tree cover, um, has not a whole lot of access to parks and open space, has a high instance of things like asthma, heart disease, and, uh, other things as a result of the pollutants that are in the air there and in the water.

Um, across town, for comparison, we have the Cherry Creek area, uh, on average a 60 percent tree cover. Lots of access to parks and open space. Um, very different populations, right? Globe, Globeville is predominantly people of color. Cherry Creek is predominantly white. Um, it also affects things like people's life expectancy. So, the state of Colorado, um, the average life expectancy is 80.5 years. Over in the Cherry Creek area, the life expectancy is above that at 85 point, like, six years. In Globeville, the life expectancy is 72.8 years, right? And so, in the same town, same city, we see the long-term impacts of these systems and, that have been made, and when people look at it now, you know, they say, oh, why don't those people just move? Or, like, you know, they, they like, if you want parks, move to someplace with parks. If you want, like, and they don't understand this history that has led to lack of access, um, uh, for people of color and all of these environmental justice issues that are just, like, so bad. The, um, you know, what people are exposed to and have to go through within these spaces.

Alexis Miles: So, as people learn this history, does it change how they do their work?

Parker McMullen Bushman: In some ways it does. I think in, I try to provide a, a hopeful narrative and actions that people can do to actually make change, you know? So, I don't find guilt to be a really productive emotion. And, I think when people hear about, like, the lasting impacts of things like slavery and redlining, um, and segregation, there is this like guilty feeling, especially if they are not part of the marginalized groups that have gone through, through those things. You know, my grandmother used to say, like, uh, we didn't spill the milk, but we're the ones here to clean it up, right? And, it's, kind of, like that. Like, the people here today are not responsible for, like, slavery, right? They're not responsible for, uh, those policies and laws. But, we do have the opportunity to change those things. And, rather than, like, blaming or saying, like, oh, it's your responsibility. It's your responsibility. Like, we have to be able to come together and see what the issue is. Like, we're all sitting here staring at 400-year-old curdled milk trying to figure out, like, what to do.

And so, like, when people have strategies, like, you grab that mop, I'm gonna grab a bucket, we're gonna get, you know, that's when they have strategies to start working through it, then I think they're able to take the information better and able to make change. And, that's one of the things, like, I really try and balance during my workshops because it can be very easy when you get this information to, uh, kind of, shut down, either feel guilt or shame or feel, uh, because of that, because you don't wanna feel that guilt and shame, feel anger and, you know, wanna go on the offense and, you know, say that, like, it doesn't matter now, and, like, people need to get over it, and, like, pick yourself up and do these things, like, woo, you know, I didn't have anything to do with that. That can definitely, you know, be a space that people get into when they don't feel like there's any change that they can make or they feel like they're being blamed for, um, some current system of oppression, which is so much bigger than any of us.

Sam Fuqua: Parker, I wanted to get your take on this idea of being an ally, and how you approach that within perhaps a predominantly white environmental organization. You might be asked to, uh, come in and talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Parker McMullen Bushman: So, I like to talk about allyship skills rather than having, like, a label, like, labeling ourselves as, as an ally. Um, I think of an ally as a member of a social group that enjoys some privilege, and they're working to end oppression, and also understand their own privilege. And, when I talk about privilege, because that's, kind of, become a, a four-letter-word, right? That's another tender point that I often find in my work in workshops because people think of, if you're telling someone that they have privilege, that they're a bad person, and they haven't worked for what they have earned, right? And, like, the standard definition of privilege is, like, that society is grants privilege to certain people because of certain aspects of their identity, right? And, that could be race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, language, all of these things, and that they are unearned benefits giving the people who fit into a specific social group. But when I describe privilege, I describe it a little bit differently. I describe it as having a system that has been designed with you in mind.

And so, like, if I get up in the morning and I say, I'm gonna go, you know, shopping today. I wanna go dress shopping, right? And I leave my home, I don't have to worry about if, like, the

cute little boutique that I saw online, if it is accessible, you know, to my wheelchair. Or, if, like, one of the boutiques that I really like to go to is in an old, um, mo, three story motel downtown that they've renovated into different, uh, boutiques, and it's on the second floor, and there's no elevator up, right? I don't have to plan for those things because I am an able-bodied person that lives in a world that was designed for and by able-bodied people. So, I have privilege in that area, not because, like, I did anything special. I just happened to be within a space that was designed by someone who had that part of my identity, and that space works well for me because it was designed with that part of my identity in mind, right? And, we all have those different parts of us. Like, privilege doesn't mean you didn't work hard. I like to give the example of if you have, like, two college students that are studying for their final exam, and, um, they all do all the things. They go to extra practice sessions. They, like, talk to the professor. They stay late. They do the flashcards. Everything that's needed. And they get into the test. And, um, they get done with it, and student number one gets an A plus, student number two gets a B plus. The only different between the two students is that student number one is a native English speaker, student number two is not. And so, when they took the test, they had to, like, translate it into their native language, and their brain, think of, like, the answer, translate it back into English, write it down on the paper. And that extra bit of processing time meant that they didn't get through with the last question, so they didn't get as good of a grade.

And, I asked my class, like, did student number one deserve the A plus? Everybody's always quiet. They're like, I, I, I don't know the answer. And I'm like, yes. Like, they deserve the A plus. They worked really hard, right? And they deserved that grade that they got. But with the understanding that the test, the system, worked better for them because they were a native English speaker, we can then look for, like, what are some measures that we can do to help the other person? Do they get a little bit of extra time on their test? Do they get their test in their native language and then we translate it after, right? Like, it doesn't mean that we wanna, like, take the A plus away from student number one. We wanna make sure that, that the system is equally beneficial to student number two. And so, having privilege doesn't mean that you didn't work hard. It just means that certain parts of your identity weren't standing in the way as you did that hard work. And, when I talk to organizations, you know, I, I tell them that building those systems, it doesn't even necessarily have to be malicious. Like, I mean, we have some systems here that were definitely designed to do what they're doing, and they're continuing to do it well, right?

But, if someone says, I'm gonna start a nonprofit, they're probably pulling, like, people that they know, um, to help them with that, that project. And then they get those people into a room and they say, okay, what do we need? What do we want? What do we envision for this thing? And, if they share similar identities, right, that thing that they envision that makes them feel comfortable and successful and everything may work really well for other people with similar identities. But, when you get someone that comes in that doesn't have that shared identity, they might not feel as comfortable, they may not feel like they belong as much, right? And so, we have to, uh, first part of allyship is understanding what our, our privilege is, and we've talked a lot about racial privilege since 2020, and it's still very important, but it's not the only type of privilege. And, all of us, I think, hold intersections of privilege and not privilege, and it's easier for us to see the not privilege. That's why when you tell someone, oh, you have white privilege, and they say, no, I don't. I grew up poor. Well, that's socioeconomic privilege. And they could see very clearly how

they did not benefit socioeconomically, right, but it's harder to see, um, how things maybe weren't as hard for them racially.

Like, I know as a Black American, even though, you know, I'm on the, further away in racial privilege, that I would still be more likely to call the police if I have an issue than someone who is undocumented, right, because I, I have the privilege of being a citizen, right? And so, I can then, when I know the areas that I have privilege in, then as someone who wants to use my allyship skills, I can use either my voice to speak up for folks that I know, or I can use my voice to create a path for them to be able to speak up for themselves. And the reason why I call it allyship skills is because, you know, I think a lot of people have worn the label, they're like, I'm an ally, and then maybe they do something that is not a good ally action and someone calls them out and says that they're not an ally. And, when it feels like it's a label and a part of your identity, that feels like a big wound, and you're like, what do you mean I'm not an ally? Like, I saw this happening all over the internet in 2020. You know, someone would say something, and then, like, people were like flame 'em, and then they'd be like, that's why nobody wants to help y'all anyway, you know, type thing because they felt, like, wounded, right?

But, acting as an ally, I think, it's better to focus on the actions. It's not about your identity. And then, if you do an action that is not a great ally action, you can always come back from that, right? Because we can always change our actions, right? And you can be a better ally the next day. I think another thing that people don't understand about allyship is that there are multiple levels, and many people are, uh, operating on the first setting, and having gotten to like the highest level. And so, I call it, uh, actor ally accomplice. And, at the actor level of allyship, it's someone who understands that there's an issue, wishes that it would change, but doesn't feel empowered enough or like they couldn't do anything enough to make any change. So, they're not doing any actions, right? And, if they do some actions, sometimes they're like performative. They're like a spectator at a football game. Like, they see the action on the field, but they're just, kind of, like, watching it from afar. And, they're, like, maybe they'll tee, cheer on their team, like, and racism, I'm gonna make, I'm gonna have a black profile picture, right, but they are not actually, they're not in the play.

And so, then, like, the next level is that typical ally level when someone's doing actions. Um, typically, they are operating in spaces of privilege. So, um, they understand that there's an issue. Maybe they've been doing reading or, uh, attending classes, and they're at a party and someone says something inappropriate, right? And they're willing to step up and say, oh, actually, I, uh, let, I wanna share with you, I read this article, or, like, we don't use that terminology anymore. They are willing to challenge the status quo by educating themselves and others. Um, however, at this level, oftentimes it is their allyship is conditional, and oftentimes, they're doing it out of, not, um, solidarity, but, like, oh, those poor people over there who don't have as much privilege as, I feel so bad for them, so maybe I should do this or that, right? And, it's conditional because, well, they might call out someone at a party. If their boss were to say the same thing in a work meeting, they might be less likely to call out their boss because then they might be seen as, like, the rebel rouser, and it might affect their career or something like that, right? So, there's conditions there.

The super duper Mario level ten, um, is, like, accomplice. Accomplice, uh, there's a couple of key differences. One, the accomplices, uh, typically have made really strong relationships with the

people most impacted by systems of oppression. So, it's not something that's abstract. Like, they can see it in the lives of their friends, their family, people in their community that they love and built relationships with. And, um, they've moved past this, like, oh, those poor people over there, I want to help them, into understanding that it's about, it's solidarity. That breaking down these systems doesn't only help these people over there, it also helps me. 'Cause when we look at these systems of oppression, they're really not, they're only good for, like, a few people, right? When we look at, uh, racism, yeah, we talk about white privilege, but, like, if you are a white person that acts outside of any of the norms of white supremacy or whiteness, you get taken down real fast. You get made to feel like you are not part of the, uh, pack real fast.

Let's say you are a man and you're like, okay, the patriarchy's supposed to, like, help me, right? But, um, you, on the flip side of the patriarchy, is, like, kind of, shrinking down of what a man can be like, uh, don't show emotion, um, like, we, I'm not asking you about your family. Like, I get asked about my family all the time. My partner does it, uh, you know. And, like, we have this, like, narrow definition of what it means to be a man that's really, uh, stifling. And so, a man that is an accomplice has, eh, close relationships with people who are gender minorities. They are going along with whatever those people say needs to happen. So, they're taking their direction from the people most impacted. They realize that the systems are bad for them as well. Like, I'm not just break, breaking patriarchy 'cause I feel bad for those people over there, but I understand that it's bad for me as well, which means that I'm continuing to do this even when it's, um, hard or difficult for, you know, to do it because I realize I have personal stake in it, and I'm not just walking away when it's convenient for me, just like a gender minority. They're always a gender minority, right? Um, they can't walk away from that. And so, like, I can't walk away from my advocacy and being an accomplice.

Alexis Miles: So, I'm curious about something. In terms of environmental racism, what is one action that a listener could take to help expand their perception about what environmental racism is, and what an individual or a group of people can do? So, what is one step in that direction a person could take?

Parker McMullen Bushman: One step? Oh goodness. One single step. Okay. I think the first step in understanding what environmental racism is, and in making change about it, and action about it, is educating yourself. But if you feel like, oh, I've listened to Parker. I'm already so educated about this, um, I encourage people to figure out what is going on in their community. In almost any community, you can, uh, see this, it used to be easier. Uh, a part of what's happening and making my work a little bit harder is a lot of the data that, um, backs up the need for, you know, environmental justice work, and a lot of this work is, has, is being taken away. The CDC map that I referenced, I used to use with all of my clients, it came down in February, the life expectancy map. Luckily, I, I had some screenshots of, like, Denver, and places that I talk about a lot, but it got taken away, you know, um, NASA was ordered to bring down the satellites that have been gathering climate change data for years, and have it burn up with an entry, right? So, they are taking away a lot of the ways that we can see what's happening. And so, people might need to dig a little bit harder. But, in almost every area that I've ever looked in, there are environmental disparities.

And, we are seeing much more now with the, um, advent of AI, and the, like, server farms. A lot of people are so excited about AI. So excited about a lot of different industries. And what they don't realize are the environmental harms and impacts that happen to marginalized communities just like those redlined communities. And so, now, where they are placing those things, those, uh, AI server farms that are jumping up the heat in areas 'cause you have a bunch of, uh, servers, like, generating heat, and you have to use so much water to cool them down. It's like taking water resources. I just saw a report of a woman talking about, like, she was showing a reporter the water coming out of her tap, and it was just, kind of, like, brown sludge, you know, and she talked about the change over time. So, maybe that's a place where, like, look into AI, folks, like, because all of these things that we think are, like, great for humanity, I think yes, but also, who is being the most impacted? And when we have things like water no longer being a human right, but a commodity, and we are creating systems where big corporations can have access to water that people need to live, to use for things like, you know, this AI, that's a, that's an issue, right?

Um, when we're choosing these natural resources, whether these natural resources are gonna go to robots and computers or for humans to, to live and survive, and I think people need to look at the poorest people in your area because that is where the environmental harms start first. And, I also encourage people to, to step away from the "not in my backyard" mentality, right? Um, one, I've always thought it was, kind of, silly because it's not like there's a wall at the end of neighborhoods, right? If you, if you say, not in my backyard, first of all, more than likely it's coming into my back, my black queer backyard. But then, um, also, it has to go somewhere, and it will eventually come to you. It's just hitting the poorest people first. Brown people first. Queer people first. Disabled people, uh, first, are, like, so impacted by things like climate change. And, I call these group our indicator species. I'm on science nerd out on you for just one second.

So, I used to teach a course called macro invertebrates, and we would take kids out to ponds in the spring, and they would, uh, scoop up these animals out of the water. That's when you have, like, insects that are laying their eggs, and tadpoles, and all of these things. And, they would put the animals into a bucket and look at the type of invertebrates that they could see. And, we would give them a guide to the invertebrates 'cause you could tell the water quality based on which invertebrates were present and which were not. So, if you had certain species like mosquito, larva or water boatmen, um, and not some of the more sensitive species, you knew that that water quality actually wasn't very good 'cause those are primarily, uh, air breathing, uh, even mosquitoes with their, like, little butts out the water, air breathing invertebrates. But if you could find the, like, more sensitive species, you knew the water quality was really good. And, if you had, there was, kind of, grade, so there were, like, the most sensitive species, some were, that were a little less sensitive, so you could even tell how bad it was or good it was.

And, um, the thing about it is, like, our, people who are the most vulnerable, are our most sensitive species, and they are the ones being impacted first. And we've got our more hardier species and more hardier communities that have the money or the resources to say, not in my backyard, to go and advocate for themselves, while other people can't. And, we are watching our indicator species, which are our most vulnerable communities, die out. And the problem is you might say, okay, well, we still got some life, but eventually the pollution gets so bad that not even the mosquito larva or the, you know, water boatmen or whatever, can survive in that water. And so, I think people see what's happening, and they've, can remove themselves 'cause they're like,

I have the money and the resources and things to protect my family, my neighborhood, my community, but once these species, once our most vulnerable communities are wiped out, they're coming for you next. Like, the pollution is gonna spread, the environmental stuff is gonna spread, the social justice stuff is gonna spread. It never just stays with those most vulnerable communities. But, I think people feel, like, if they, they can be sacrificed. And, I think a lot of people choose to disconnect. It's not even a conscious thing, you know, they're just, kind of, disconnecting from it because it is, it can be really overwhelming.

Alexis Miles: I would like to know, Parker, if you had a brief message to give to everybody that you would think would make a difference in their lives, and how we treat each other, how we treat the environment, how we think about our life on earth, what would that message be?

Parker McMullen Bushman: Yeah, I love this question. So, when I first started this work, I, I was depressed a lot, you know. It is really heavy work to, to carry. And, I think a lot of that depression was in thinking about where I, I, like, I could imagine that, like, utopia, where we all are just getting along, and we're living in love, and we're able to have conversations and not demonize and villainize each other, and everybody has enough to eat and clean air and all of those things. And, I could not see how we were gonna get there and could, felt like there was nothing I could do to get us there. So, why am I, I'm doing this. And, um, someone told me, and this has always stuck with me, and I, I tell everyone that I can that this work is not like a marathon. It's a, it's a relay race. And that, you know, there are people who came before me that also dreamt of that, like, final destination and that utopia that they wanted to see, and they did the work that they could to get there and they passed the baton to me. And, I may never actually get to see the finish line, but my job is to run the fastest and the hardest that I can in my leg of the race so that the person that comes after me gets there a little bit quicker, gets a little bit closer. And so, I want people to understand that if you are thinking, you know, we're gonna overturn these systems tomorrow, we're gonna be dancing in the street, brand new day, right, that can be disheartening when you see the cycles again and again. But when you realize that I am just a part of this much larger story, and I just need to do the work that I can in my community, in my sphere, do what you can do, it will help make it that much better for the generation that comes after us.

Sam Fuqua: Parker McMullen Bushman, it's been a real pleasure and a treat to speak with you. Thank you for your message and for your work.

Parker McMullen Bushman: Yeah. Thank you so much for having me.

Sam Fuqua: Parker McMullen Bushman is the founder and CEO of Ecoinclusive Strategies. You can find them online at ecoinclusive.org.

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