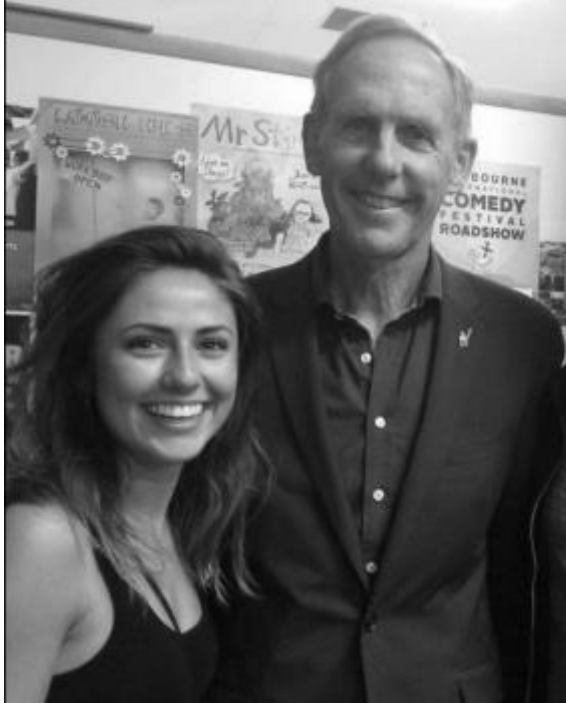


BOB BROWN



It is easy to dream about our heroes—what we would say if we met them, how much we want to be like them, what they eat for breakfast. No one tells you that when these dreams do come true, anything you ever planned or expected vanishes in the momentous energy of the moment and you may not come away with all of your questions answered or the pride of acting like an un-phased, coherent human being.

When I met my greatest role model, Bob Brown, this was exactly the case. As a pre-medical undergraduate with a consuming passion for the environment, I could do nothing less than fully cling to the story of Bob Brown, a story that continues to this very day. He is a man, a leader, a neighbor, who embodies the core of the sustainability movement like no one else I have ever encountered in body or spirit. Thus, it is only fitting to begin with his empowering journey.

Robert James “Bob” Brown is one of the leading environmental activist in Australia’s history. He began his career as a medical doctor and interestingly was on duty in the hospital that accepted Jimi Hendrix when he was found dead. He moved to the state of Tasmania to continue his practice in 1972, which was during the campaign to save Lake Pedder from being flooded as a source for hydroelectric power generation. He became heavily involved in the movement against the damming of the lake and though it failed, in 1992, Brown founded Australia’s first ever green party. He transformed from a beloved member of the community into a beacon of agency and respect for the land on which this community had the privilege of inhabiting. His crisp white coat was replaced with hiking

boots and a motivation so immense that it burst through his individual interests and manifested in so much from the directing of the Tasmanian Wilderness Society—an organization which coordinates blockades, research expeditions, community events, and policy consultations—to a week-long fast atop Mt. Wellington in Hobart, Tasmania to publically protest the nuclear-powered warship USS *Enterprise*.

Brown grew the constituency of the Greens in Australia such that it became a contending entity alongside the dominant Labor and Liberal parties and therefore became a part of political agreement formulations regarding forestry legislation and protection acts for farmers who’s land was a target for foreign mining operations or other environmentally destructive industries such as coal seam gas. Though he has since left his political career officially, he remains an avid activist through his support of authors bringing awareness to Aboriginal justice, participating in current environmental blockades, and enjoying the wild spaces that he has single-handedly fought to conserve.

With this remarkable history in mind, I approached him during an art exhibit dedicated to saving the Tarkine forest during a botany research internship in Australia. I was speechless, all while shaking his hand and beaming uncontrollably. He started by asking for my name, then where I was from. As soon as I mentioned going to Rice, he spoke of his travels to Houston, Texas, the kind people and the landscapes he remembered from over 20 years prior. He asked me many questions of my studies, where I had traveled, and left little time for me to return with questions of my own before he had to attend to other individuals at the gathering. And that is precisely what has solidified him as a hero. His concern is always for others, always for the land and every species its holds, including little old me.

Through the many public speaking events I was able to watch him lead both before and after this meeting, I learned that the number one obstacle he faced with interfacing with people who had never experienced the beauty and value they were attempting to destroy. Much of his political campaign centered around bringing industry heads into the ecosystems they were affecting and even stopping on his hikes to make conversation with those he would pass. He faced the reality that these issues had no voice, their efficacy

did not exist. He had to graduate from his time as a doctor to be a steward where no one was, begin institutions and movements that remain strong today. He felt the burden of moving inert passion in the first few moments of unbearable friction simply so that when the momentum was gained, others would have something to support and carry it on. This, despite the beautiful presence of the movement in niches of America, resonates with me because of the large scale absence of voices for climate refugees, the flora and fauna going extinct daily, and the self-destructive systems on which our society is built. If I could meet Bob Brown once more and ask three questions, they would be:

What necessarily fuels you through harsh opposition on local and national scales?

What does sustainable success look like to you globally?

From your experience, where am I most needed in this movement?

"You know me, I'm an admirer of wild things."

Bob Brown

