

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

It was the most unlikely place one might think of learning a valuable life lesson, but there I was face to face with it. The train had just pulled away and I was on it during the rush hour of a Friday morning. It did not smell like the pine forests that I am accustomed to. It was standing room only. Bunched next to strangers, for me, is one of the most uncomfortable of experiences, but the Pier 39 gallery was expecting me and hundreds of people were waiting for me to give a talk, it's not like I could just go back to the airport and book a flight to some wilderness location – after all, I have responsibilities now and they were all waiting.

At first I didn't even notice her sitting there just to the right of me, mostly because you're not supposed to I guess. We don't live in a society that rewards outspoken friendly behavior. You're thought to be 'weird' if you say 'Hi' to someone on the street that you don't know. Can you image doing that in NYC?

Her notebook was open and she was obviously studying. The book bag at her feet had the name 'Mulisha' ballpoint penned into its canvas surface. In my line of work, my first career that is, 'mu' or " μ " is a symbol that is used to represent the mean of a mathematical function, often referred to as the average. "Average", that's what her parents had called her, an average 'lisha' I thought. I wondered if her parents even thought about that when they named her, doubtful, but there she sat doing her homework – an average 'lisha'.

She closed her notebook and sat it there in her lap and opened her biology book, if I recall correctly and started reading it. The tip of her notebook, which she had just closed, poked out from underneath the biology book. There were several things written on the outside cover and it reminded me of the 'Pee Che' notebook covers I had when I was in junior high. I had penned a thing or two into those covers in my day, but nothing as poetic as what I was about to read.

I took another look at her young face, so full of hope. She had stenciled "You need me, I need you, together all our dreams can come true." The precious nature of life is something we often forget to celebrate. Sometimes it takes a lifetime to understand – perhaps because by then there is so little of it left. But there she was, at such a young age, boiling it down to that simple truth – I need you, You need me.

So if by some chance Mulisha, you read this someday, I wish I'd had the courage to say it then, but Hi! My heart and my thanks go out to you for your unknowing youthful spirit because you are the impetus of our future and with youth like this I am encouraged. Mulisha - you are anything but average.

Like the fish in the stream, or the storm clouds on the distant horizon, or the trembling of the leaves on a nearly vanquished aspen at the end of fall, or the alpenglow off a freshly dusted snowy mountain peak at dawn, or the beaver's slap against the water at evenings twilight, or the mid days' shade of a prairie oak in lush spring grass watching cartoon clouds float overhead, or bald eagles playing across the sky in a symphony of flight, I wonder if there is anything better than this life. It's interesting to me how things get to be. I've got a fine life - one filled with people who truly care about me, as I do for them. I awake everyday not knowing exactly what's before me. Will the day bring joy or sadness, a little of both? I don't know. What I do know is that it is a new day and I will embrace it and live life.

Many a ragged mile, a couple stitches, more than a few blisters, have gone into the making of this book. I have spilt my own blood for this book - for you, for all of us. It is enlightening though, as I find myself between the two worlds that I am bounded by, a bit of a stranger to both, the city in which I live and the wilderness for which my heart belongs. My heart pounds and my lungs gasp with each step taken over a twelve thousand foot pass, step after step, knowing something wonderful awaits. Wilderness does truly hold the answers to questions we've not yet learned to ask.

A common question I am often faced with is: "How do you do that?" – I tell you now bluntly - Stripped emotionally naked. That's how. That's what it takes. One must be willing to let the world, strangers mostly, peek into the inner sanctum of your soul. It takes being strong enough to not care, not care that is to what others think about the work you've created. You bare your soul with every piece shared and it alone will speak volumes of who you are and what you believe in, what you believe to be important. It's like finding a treasure chest and knowing that you must share the treasures inside. For some treasures are too precious to keep to ones self.

If a 'picture' is worth a thousand words, then this collection of photographs will have you 'reading' for some time. I trust that you will enjoy it as much as I have enjoyed the work required to bring it home to you.

One of the most renowned living photographers of our day wrote the forward to this book. We had not seen each other in years, but on that spring day in the Grand Teton National Park it was like we'd never missed a step in our personal development and we picked up right where we had left off so many years ago. During our conversation the creation of this book came up as a topic of discussion. Clyde asked, "What is the underlying purpose of this book?"

No one had asked me that question. I knew why I was doing it, but no one had asked me, until then. Simply put, the purpose of this book is very simple in nature, however, the final result can only be measured years, if not decades, from now.

Within these pages: Can you see the beauty of the world you live in? Can you visit this beauty firsthand? Can you witness to others the beauty that you have seen? Can you protect it for future generations?

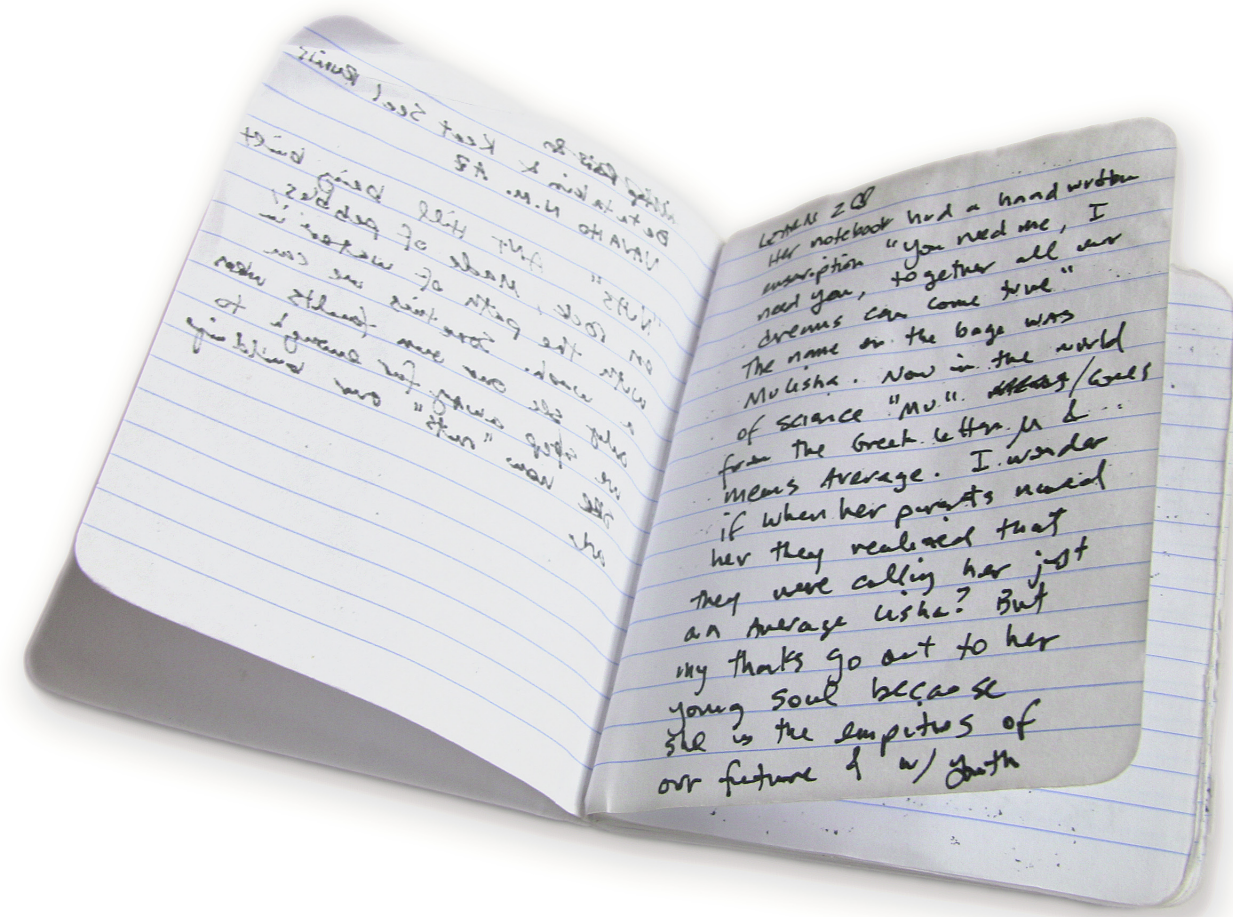
If you don't know about wild places such as these, how can you be expected to understand anything different than what you now know? The images in this book, for better or worse, are meant to bring the beauty of the wilderness into your home.

If you can't make it to these places, know that they are real, know that they need to remain there untouched and unspoiled, know that you can make a difference, know that your children's children must have these places available to them. The purpose of this book is very simple – You Now Know about these places.

See Ya on the Trail!



Rodney Lough Jr.



From Rodney's actual field notebook



"This is Life, That is Death", one of Rodney's favorite sayings

Photograph by Mike Ferrell