Grizzly Times Podcast
Transcript
Interview with Reno Sommerhalder
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Louisa Willcox: This is Louisa Willcox with Grizzly Times, and I'm delighted to be here today with Reno Sommerhalder. Reno's a naturalist, filmmaker, guide and an expert on bear ecology and behavior. And his passion for grizzlies has taken him around the world. Reno's originally from Switzerland, but for the last many years he's lived his dream in Banff, where he studies bears and other wildlife and works to promote coexistence. Thanks Reno for joining us today.

Reno Sommerhalder: Oh, I really appreciate the opportunity, Louisa.

L: So Reno, you've been obsessed with grizzlies ever since your fist visit to the Canadian wilderness, when you had an interesting encounter with a bear in Jasper Park that changed your life. What happened?

R: I was 19 years old when this happened. I was young and naïve -- I barely spoke any English. I was pretty fresh out of Switzerland. I had really no clue about bears, or wilderness etiquette for that matter. And during the day I'd walk around with a little Swiss cowbell that somebody had given me as a farewell gift. And during the day I had it attached to my backpack and at nighttime I would hang it up in my tent.

And so, one night I was in Jasper National Park – and in the middle of the night, I wake up because my cowbell is ringing. The whole tent was shaking and I sit up in my sleeping bag. I stare into the face of a bear who had torn open the side of the tent and stuck his head through that hole. And we looked at one another -- probably both shocked. And fortunately though, he pulled out the head after a couple of seconds and walked off.

I had food in the tent at the time -- like I said, I had no clue about bear etiquette in those days. But it was that encounter really that attracted me to the world of bears. And while other people would have potentially been pushed away from bears from an encounter like that, for me it worked like a magnet. And I wanted to know about these animals and how they thought, and how they felt, and how they lived. And so from that moment on pretty much, I spent every free minute I had in my life amongst and with bears and studying literature, and trying to really get into the head and hearts of these animals.

L: So you're an expert in wilderness survival and you've foraged a lot on native plants. How does your work on native plants help you to understand the grizzly bear?

R: In most of what I do -- I do a lot of educational work with grizzly bears, I do multimedia talks, we shot some documentaries about bears, I wrote a couple of books, however in German so far, about bears. And in all the work I do and in all my thinking about bears, I always again and again and again come back to the similarities between them and us. And that's one of my approaches of trying to get bears close to people by showing them how similar we really are in many ways.

Grizzly bears and people, we're both omnivores, we have a very similar diet. Our digestive system is a little different, but as far as the food that goes in, we're very similar. And as most people know, there are accounts of native tribes around the Northern Hemisphere that have apparently followed bears and tried to copy their feeding behavior. And learned from bears what was edible and what was maybe not. And so for me, the more I find out about what bears eat and when they eat and where they find it, the more I realize that most of these foods have been or are still eaten by people today somewhere around the world.

And in fact, with that idea in mind, I began years ago -- as background, many years ago I learned to become a chef. I was trained in the French classic cuisine. And so I combined that knowledge of bear food with my old trade, cooking. And I started offering bear meals, bear educational evenings where I prepare with the help usually of a kitchen team, we would prepare a three or four course meal -- and every single item on the plate in front of people would be somewhere in the Northern Hemisphere bear food, wild bear food.

And if you think about it, honey, all sorts of different wild game meat, berries, root vegetables, lettuce like dandelion and stuff, there are so many foods that we can eat that bears eat today. And so I combined them and also designed at the same time for each course of those meals a slideshow in which bears would eat and dig up or catch exactly the foods that people have on their plates right at that moment. And while the people were actually eating it, they would see those images. And I would say a few words about the images and stuff, and just try to bring bears closer to people basically through our stomachs. And who doesn't like to eat? So, from an educational aspect, I thought that was quite catchy.

L: It's a wonderful idea. Reno, you've worked very closely with another premiere bear expert, Charlie Russell, and you worked with him on a rehabilitation effort of a number of grizzly bear orphan cubs in Kamchatka in the Russian Far East. And it sounds like you may have been worried that surrogate human moms to baby bears would be a difficult proposition, but you found that wasn't the case. What led you to that realization?

R: I naturally accepted Charlie's offer at the time -- and very quickly because it was obviously an amazing opportunity to be able to spend a summer with the famous Charlie Russell out in the wilds of the Russian Far East. And to this day I have to say it was one of my most memorable summers ever amongst bears. It was a fantastic summer.

But yeah at the beginning I thought: why would these bear cubs follow a human being through the wilderness? What would entail them to accept us really as surrogate mothers? I couldn't quite picture that. And even though I had done some tryouts earlier in Alaska with orphaned grizzly bears cubs that I had found, it wasn't quite on a daily basis like it was there with Charlie in the Russian Far East.

And so, what I learned pretty quickly is how quickly they adopted us and how quickly they would follow every one of our steps into the wilderness, which kind of blew me away. From a food perspective, I was kind of trying to figure out: what will it take for us to teach those little critters bear knowledge basically? Where do you dig up and find the plants that they need, at what time of year? It seemed all very complicated to me at the time, but I did not realize how much comes to them instinctually.

They knew exactly where to go, they knew which plants to eat at what time of year without either one of us or their mother having showed them where those food items would be found. And so that was very amazing to me. Up to that point I always thought everything that a bear knows would be learned from the mother. And while the mother certainly helps to show the cubs in real life, it doesn't seem to me that they really require that. And that summer I realized that the main purpose of a female mother towards her cubs is the safety on the one hand and the really fatty mother's milk that certainly helps them during the first year, two years of their lives. But yeah so much seems to be instinctual, and they knew exactly what to eat and where to find those things.

L: One of the many dangers that cubs face is being killed by male bears. It's rare but it does happen. Reno, maybe you can share a bit about your personal experiences with this.

R: It was a fairly tragic event -- we had this male bear that started following us. And I remember this one time, Charlie -- we had decided that we'd go on walks together every day, since we knew that this bear was around. And the day that we found out that this bear showed an interest was a day where we left the cabin -- Charlie was ahead and then the cubs followed, and I was walking behind. And we walked past this male bear -- he was about 30-40 yards from us, feeding, grazing in a meadow. And we walked past him. And I stopped while Charlie and the cubs continued without any worries whatsoever about this bear, because we had passed him before.

And that day for some reason I stopped and talked to the bear. And he kind of sat down, and he looked up and looked at me, and he looked over the cubs as they were disappearing around the corner. And then he got up with his nose to the ground and started following them. And then I caught up with Charlie and told him: "hey this male's following." And then at some point I turned around because I couldn't see him anymore.

So I made a few steps backwards and I saw that he was running now trying to catch up with us. And so we were trying in a hurry -- his intent was pretty obvious, he had just realized that those little bears might be good food. And so from that moment on we were trying to make it back to the cabin, back to the safety of the electric fence that surrounded the cabin at the time. And we had chosen a shortcut back to the cabin.

And all of the sudden this bear stood right in front of us, cutting us off in turn. And it was just amazing to see how this bear worked, and how smart they are, and how their noses work and know exactly what we had in mind. Long story made short, we found our way safely back without having to use pepper spray or anything on this male. And that was it. But that was the first time that that bear kind of gave us trouble.

And from that day on we really had to watch our steps when we were out with the cubs. And it was right around the time when we left a portion of the fence open, so that the opening was large enough that the cubs could get out, but no larger bears could follow them back in. And that was the idea -- when they wanted to have more independence, oftentimes they wouldn't come home anymore after the walks with them in the evenings. So they would settle down somewhere under a pine bush and go to sleep. And they looked at us and yawned and basically told us that they were not coming home tonight -- similar to what teenagers do when they spend the first night away from home. And so that happened.

And during that time, I remember one night we both woke up in the cabin because the bears came running back. We could hear them thundering along the tundra coming back, running back into the safety of the electric fence -- they were huffing and puffing outside. And we went outside with a flashlight and saw that two of the cubs had come back, the two more dominant ones, Gena and Sheena.

And then the next morning, we went out look for the others and we found two more cubs. And then the next day after that we woke up in the morning, we saw a bear on the far side of the shore on the lake who was feeding on something in a meadow where there is no food -- because we knew this meadow well. And so, we walked out there, and it was that same male bear that had caught Wilder, one of the male cubs -- he was eating him. So that was a very tragic and from that moment on we really had to watch, because now he had the taste for the cubs, and it was getting trickier.

But the amazing thing about this was that he never had any interest or showed any interest in us whatsoever, neither Charlie nor me. There was never a bluff charge, it was never any sort of dangerous behavior or language from his part towards us. It was always intended on the cubs. So that was interesting -- similar to a female with cubs. And I've watched that in the wild as well.

But yeah, like you mentioned at the very beginning, I think the amount of predation on cubs by larger males is maybe over-played a little bit. In general, I think the

denser the population is the more likely predation by larger males might happen. But yeah, it's always tragic. And even though it's part of the natural system, it's a very tragic thing to observe for sure.

L: Yeah. You describe the playfulness of cubs and the joy of learning how to sled down the snowfield which these cubs learned how to do. What was it like to be in the midst of all that bear energy and enthusiasm?

R: Oh, it's wonderful, it's absolutely amazing! I mean to this day, especially once they were a little larger and the age of maybe 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 months -- they would already be quite the big fur balls. And the tundra there is fairly soft with a lot of sponge material underneath. And you could feel their steps when they weren't far away. And when they were running you could literally hear them running on the tundra -- these little thundering steps. And whenever they were playing, chasing one another, you had to make sure if they're running towards you from behind you that you wouldn't make one step to the left or to the right, or they would run you right over.

It was just amazing, the games we could play with them, pulling them off rocks and them trying to pull us off rocks. It was amazing to see that playfulness that they had and intelligence behind in those little heads of these little bears, and the thinking that was going on in those heads. It was brilliant to be around them during those days.

And I have to say here that actual physical contact is obviously not something that you want to encourage with wild bears for very good reasons, because in the end you always have to ask yourself: "how does it help the bear?" It doesn't help the bear in any way.

In this case, Charlie had this theory that he wanted to test about how these bears react to us people, especially once we have physical contact with them. Do they really become dangerous and unpredictable towards us?

So, this was a way for Charlie to test some of his theories by actually allowing that physical contact to happen to them, and to fully have them habituated to us. And I have to say that in that year, when they were hefty bears already with a lot of strength, we didn't once even get a scratch, because they knew exactly -- they could differentiate on my arm, for example, between a naked arm, the bare skin, and the sweater that would cover it. And they would bite a little harder with a sweater on it, and they would be very gentle when the skin was bare. And I was just amazed to see how gentle and how sensitive these bears would actually be. And so again, the comparison to people was just amazing. The emotional life of these animals, in my opinion, is really not much different when you compare them with us.

The one thing in my opinion that might be quite different is their priority settings. Our priorities have long passed a survival stage, right? Like in the western culture,

we're way passed that stage. Bears still have to think of survival on a daily basis, and that really differentiates how they react to certain situations.

L: And they have to think about their stomachs so much. Given that they're hibernating through the winter, food becomes an enormous priority in the late summer and fall.

R: Oh yeah, I'm astonished year after year -- again, living in the Central Rockies here which is considered to be very marginal habitat for grizzly bears -- how not only do they make it through the winter, but they come out in the spring with fat reserves still on their bodies. And that's after basically feeding on grasses, berries, some carrion maybe, and roots. And I find that amazing -- how they do that year after year after year that they find enough food, enough calories to pack on those 20,000 calories per day during hyperphagia, like right now. I find that really astonishing.

L: Yeah, it is a miracle, the whole hibernation process and all that goes into it. Scientists know a lot about how it works, but at some point you just kind of throw up your arms and go: "wow this is kind of a miracle."

R: It is absolutely amazing. The whole birth of bear cubs too I find quite magical. The late implantation -- and all that most people already know. For me it's like bears are really born two times. The first time they are born between the end of January and the end of February in the den site, within the belly of the earth basically, if you want. And when they're still tiny and totally helpless, the mother picks them up and starts nursing them right away in the dark of the den site.

But then the second birth occurs at some point in April, when bears emerge out of the belly of the earth for the first time and see daylight for the first time. And then at that point, at that stage, they're real bear cubs with fur and open eyes and the cute little things that we know. And so it's like they're almost born twice in my mind.

And I find that just wonderful how nature has created this process -- I mean it's like all things in nature. Everything has evolved over hundreds of thousands of years and has perfectly adapted to its niche that it's sitting in within the system, within that chain of interconnectedness. And I just find that amazing how we humans oftentimes -- especially in a situation like a zoo where we take a critter like this that is perfect, and we stick them into a concrete pit somewhere, where none of their traits that evolved over such a long period of time really come to light anymore. And you know that arrogance behind a captive facility of wild animals -- it's just very very inappropriate in my books. And so, if you understand that interconnectedness and the time that's behind the evolutionary process, then that's a total no go.

L: Well, speaking of bears on concrete and in zoos, you have spearheaded an effort and have been a long term supporter of efforts to rehabilitate and release into the wild grizzly bear cubs in Canada and especially in Alberta, where no rehabilitation facilities yet exist. And we had experiences in the U.S. and in Canada earlier this

spring with a couple grizzly bear mothers in Montana, and in your part of the world who were shot and left orphan cubs. And in the case of Canada they were taken in by the Calgary Zoo. And many people would think: "well that's a success because these animals aren't dead." But they were never rehabilitated -- and in fact, they were sent on to another zoo at the end of the day. So, what is your idea about how we should go forward with such situations of orphan cubs?

R: Well when brown or grizzly bears become orphaned within their first year, they're definitely candidates for successful rehabilitation and release back into the wild. But this day and age when grizzly bear populations and densities are shrinking all over the place -- like here in Alberta for example, we used to have a historical population of more than 6,000 grizzly bears, but today we're around 700 bears. So when you have such a decreased population that is also fragmented in some areas, with habitat loss continuing to happen, and a recovery plan that's outdated and not in action, every single bear on the landscape -- no matter if it's male or female -- becomes super important.

And so if through human behavior, through human mistakes, cubs become orphaned because the female gets killed, it is the most responsible thing to try and give those cubs a chance, a second chance at a life in the wild, and add to the population that's already out there. In a zoo they're completely lost, obviously, to the gene pool of the wild population. And they become prisoners in a human world. And that doesn't help the bears whatsoever. It might help human beings to make more money, but it certainly doesn't help the bears.

And so, yea I'm a very big supporter of rehabilitation projects of grizzly and brown bears. I'm also a supporter because I worked with those bears. I've also worked in Russia on rehab projects of both Asiatic black bears and Ussuri brown bears in the Russian taiga, and I know it works. It doesn't work 100 percent of the time because bears are like people -- they're individuals, each bear is a different character. But in most cases, it works very well with brown and grizzly bears. And I think they simply deserve the chance to live a life in the wild.

L: We lose grizzly bears each year too to trains in the U.S. and Canada. And this includes even in our national parks or next to them, like Banff and Glacier. And you had a situation in Banff recently, where a mother grizzly bear was killed by a train and left an orphan cub that managers haven't been able to find. And of course as you've said, this is really tragic as reproductive females are the driving engine of the health of these populations. And losing even few mother grizzlies can actually cripple recovery, especially if the populations are very small like this one. So, what makes the problem of train collisions so intractable and what should we do about it?

R: That's a good question. I mean when I moved here to Banff 35 years ago, the main issue was the highway. We've now many years ago fenced this highway corridor and mitigated it with wildlife crossing structures. I think this is one of the best examples worldwide, here in Banff towards Lake Louise where we have a crossing structure

for wildlife, such as bears and wolf and lynx -- about every kilometer there's a crossing structure. Some of them are overpasses and some of them are underpasses. And it's working, it's working for all species. And it's important for genetic change from north to south through Banff National Park.

And so now the emphasis on mortalities in the park, in the transportation corridor, is on the railway. So, they moved to the railway track -- the highway we've kind of cleaned up. It's very tragic. About 10 days ago we lost so-called Bear 143. She was about an 11 year old female, and she had two spring cubs. One of them became famous because apparently it had a whitish head. They called it the "Panda Cub," but that cub disappeared fairly early in the spring, in June. It's not known how it died.

And then 143 was seen several times with the remaining spring cub, and the last time was about a month ago now. And so when she was struck by the train it wasn't known if the cub was still with her or not. But nonetheless the tragedy alone of her death is big enough to raise a lot of concern. In my book not even one bear should be lost within Canada's oldest, most sacred national park. It's not acceptable.

And there are things that we can do about it, such as fencing for example. We can fence the railway tracks as well. There's no reason whatsoever that what helps with the highway, where we've reduced wildlife mortality by 99%, wouldn't also work on the railway track, if it's mitigated with crossing structures of course.

But that means investing money. And you would think that Canadian Pacific Railway, with its record profits every quarter would have enough money to invest in getting this done. And hopefully Parks Canada would -- at some point the federal government would -- put down their foot and make CP Rail behave appropriately in our national parks, so that in the future we have little or no mortality anymore on the railway tracks.

It's also, I guess, related to the density of traffic that's getting higher and higher. And there are more and more trains as well on the railway tracks. And so, some days there are so many trains -- and the trains have 120 rail cars on a train, so it takes quite a while for one train to pass. And if you have 35 to 40 trains a day, that kind of occupies the tracks for long portions of the day.

And bears don't only use the railway for travel. A lot of these trains are filled with grain, and the grain trickles down along the railway tracks. Some people have referred to this CP Right of Way as the largest bird feeder in Canada -- and that it is. If you do bird counts, it's always a great place to go. You see big flocks of grey-crowned rosy finches and many other beautiful birds along the railway tracks as they feed on grain there.

But unfortunately, it's not just the birds, but it's every critter pretty much, most of the ungulates are attracted to that grain. And then when an ungulate gets killed, of course the wolves are there, and the cougars and the lynx and the owls. And we've

lost every single species on the track so far. But the good thing about this is, like I said earlier, that there are solutions to try to reduce those mortalities to a great degree -- maybe it won't be perfect, but we can certainly do a better job than we have.

L: Well, Reno you've devoted so much of your life at this point to making the world a better place for bears, but they're still threatened across the globe by poaching, human intolerance, excessive killing, habitat destruction and, increasingly, climate change. How do you focus your time and energy and on these problems?

R: Years ago, I used to get fairly depressed about all the things that go on on the planet, and that we can barely make a dent, until I have kind of come to a place of acceptance really, where I realize that that's the way it is right now. There's gotta be a really good reason why we're at this stage on the planet, and that we can make a difference. And also, the responsibilities don't lie on my shoulders. And I'm sure you've felt similar in all the conservation work that you have been doing over the past many years.

It's kind of like climbing a mountain. You don't really look up to the top of the peak very often. You go step for step and try to be in the moment. And I think that's the single best thing that we can do is to come to a place of understanding and acceptance that that's how it is right now, and to move forward with small little steps and have hope.

And there are a lot of very bright spots on the horizon, I think. There are a lot of beautiful people out there that have similar enthusiasm and ideas for saving what nourishes us. I look at my daughter too, especially my older one -- she is now studying conservation at McGill in Montreal -- and how she and a lot of her friends, they don't want to have a car today. They try to reduce their travel time on airplanes, they try to eat organic foods, they limit their shopping as much as they can. There is so much we can do in our own little lives that can really make a difference and send a message to the neighbors and to friends and to families. And so, we can spread the work basically of how we can live more harmoniously on the planet.

L: You said that you're obsessed with notions of harmony and humility. Maybe you can explain what you mean by those notions, and why they matter so much to you.

R: Well in my past 35 years I've kind of learned a lot about myself by being in wild nature and understanding our interconnectedness to all things as soon as you're out in nature. And when you start learning about bears, it's really difficult to avoid learning about salmon, learning about plants, learning about berries, learning about water, learning about soil, learning about everything. Because you realize bear is just one species amongst many many many in that chain of interconnectedness -- and we humans are part of that chain. We're part of that same world.

And so for me, the bear is an incredibly beautiful animal. They're intelligent, they're powerful, they're beautiful aesthetically -- they have wonderful traits. But what for me is a lot more important than the bear in itself is what they symbolize. They represent an intact ecosystem basically. They're like a measuring stick, a thermometer for a healthy environment, and that's what attracts me most to bears. They're a window into nature.

And I remember reading this children's book with my younger daughter a few years ago. And in the book, a father with his two children were planning to go on a hike. And then in the morning when they wake up, it's raining heavily outside -- a big downpour -- and the kids are like: "oh that's terrible." And so the father says to them: "well I have an idea, let's go for a nature hike in our house."

And so, they go for a little walk through their house, and they look at everything that nature has provided inside the house. And in the end of the book, you realize that everything they look at in the house has been provided by nature in one way or another. And I thought this was a really nice story to show that we're so dependent on healthy nature, on all the resources. We're so connected to it, a lot more than we think we are -- even though a lot of our human structures are not in flow with the natural flow of things in my opinion, when you think about big trucks backing up and the sounds they make and the pollution that we create, and the square homes that we build as opposed to roundedness. And a lot of it is not really in flow with nature, but everything that we use -- our materials out of the natural world or resources -- come from the earth.

And so, for me that harmony, that interconnectedness, is obvious on a daily basis, in almost with every move I make. And for us to be able to find a more harmonious way of being on the planet with all the other critters is the only way -- when it comes down to it -- to actually have our own species survive. Anything else, it's just not going to work. And that's pretty obvious if you look at the planet today.

L: Reno, you've studied bears in so many places -- not just Russia and Canada, but Alaska, and Italy and Spain and elsewhere in Europe. What lessons are you learning from conservation in such ecologically and culturally diverse places?

R: I feel very privileged to be able to have seen so many places and seen the differences in the landscapes and the foods in different populations of bears worldwide, brown and grizzly bears.

But I'm going to read you a quick quote here by a famous homesteader in northern British Columbia -- his name was Stanley Edwards. He once said: "25% of bears are unfriendly, 35% are definitely unfriendly, and the rest would prefer to be left alone." It's a fun quote, right?

I would agree with his latter part: "and the rest would prefer to be left alone." Bears really don't care if humans are around or not. But I find this quote totally reflects the

old style of thinking about bears -- it's the Wild West style of thinking. How would bears be friendly towards us if we hunt them and shoot them on site every opportunity we have, which has been done with grizzly bears in the West for decades and decades? And so, bears had for a long long time no reason to trust us, no reason to respect us, because they weren't respected.

And so, this thinking like from Stanley Edwards is a thing of the past, fortunately. This is disappearing, this mentality, very very slowly, but it is disappearing.

And that thought also reminds me of when I first arrived in Russia. I was picked up by a Russian bear biologist, a lady. And she came really close to me and whispered in my ear -- and this no joke -- this is how she greeted me, she says: "welcome to Russia, our bears here are very dangerous." And I thought, wow isn't that amazing? So, there are a lot of people that actually think their bears are more dangerous or our bears are different.

But what being amongst bears around the world has taught me is that like people, bears are bears. Their behavior doesn't differentiate very much from one another. Food availability might be a little different depending on food-related stress or depending on if they were hunted, and how intensely they were hunted. Their behavior might be different but in general, bears have an unbelievable capacity to tolerate us humans. And they have shown this again and again and again how incredibly tolerant and peace-loving they are most of the time. There are certainly exceptions to that rule, but that's incredibly rare.

Bears in general worldwide -- no matter where I've been -- have been very peaceful towards me. And I've had literally 10,000s of encounters with brown and grizzly bears over the past 35 years. And for me, I don't need any more proof than that. It's very clear if we give bears a chance to be peaceful, and if we give them the respect they deserve, we will get the same respect in return. It's that simple. And that is my most important lesson that I've learned being amongst bears wherever they really occur around the world.

L: You do so much public education and outreach on behalf of grizzlies, including in your native Switzerland of course. How do you approach diverse kinds of people? And are there ways to communicate some of your messages that work better than others?

R: That's an interesting question. I've never actually thought about that, because I approach groups of people -- maybe age makes a little bit of difference if I'm standing in front of a school class as opposed to a room full of adults -- that might be different. But in general, I haven't really seen a big difference other than my message is always the same: that we can do better, we can live in harmony with nature and bears. It is fairly easy -- we just have to really listen. But that's a question I'd like to actually investigate a little further.

L: Reno, a lot of the grizzly bears news is bad news -- of bears being killed, of human intolerance. And then you tack on big serious threats like climate change that is and will affect habitat, not just in our lifetimes, but going forward. What keeps you going?

R: You could wake up in the morning and you can read all the news and feel fairly down on all the stuff that's going on -- and it's pretty serious. I would agree. There are a lot of things going on out there that make me question how much longer that we can hold on really.

But on the other hand, I go outside -- we spend a lot of time out in nature on hikes and on river trips and wherever, in the backyard. And just in the last few days here in Banff, which is one of Canada's premiere tourist towns so there aren't just a few people living here. We are lucky that we live on the edge of town, but in the last few days in the backyard we had two black bears. We had a big mule deer buck, we had an entire elk herd with a male bugling all night long, we had Barred owl hooting in the backyard. I mean all this within the last two or three days.

And as soon as you get out into nature, I find we're fueled by that beautiful energy, by the most ancient energy really there is. And it's that connection that we all still feel at times with the natural world that gets me going. And as long as nature is around, as long as there is hope that we can turn things around and do it right on the planet, that's kind of what keeps me going.

At the same time it's also my children -- I have to say that I'm doing my work partially also for them so that they have a future, so that they have opportunities to see grizzly bears in the wild and other critters, and feel that connection to nature that really connects us all.

And here is something I wrote in the last days that I posted on social media. I'll read it to you: "The wilderness contains humanity's most precious treasures, not in the form of resources to take up, log or kill, but rather like an ecosystem untouched by humans, vibrating with the life that belongs, feeding our souls and helping us understand that our human roots originate from that same ancient force."

And that's kind of what encapsulates for me the grizzly bear. The grizzly bear as a symbol of all this and that's what keeps me going.

L: Thank you Reno, this is Louisa Willcox with Grizzly Times with Reno Sommerhalder. If you want to learn more about the grizzly and what you can do to help, subscribe to our newsletter at grizzlytimespodcast.org and if you can, give us a review.