

Brooke Lehman (Transcribed by M. Suter and lightly edited for posting online)

Hello, everyone. My name is Brooke Lehman. I live in the Hudson Valley of New York. I met Murray three decades after Paul in about 1998 when I was a student at the Institute for Social Ecology. I had been a master's student at NYU in environmental philosophy and I was very dissatisfied. I was basically learning post-structuralism, reading authors like Bruno Latour, and I felt like we couldn't make a truth statement, and all of the solutions that we were given were very reformist.

I happened upon the Institute for Social Ecology, almost by accident. We had a campus in Vermont that was on a farm. It was really beautiful, and people would go up for a program for the full month of July called "Ecology and Community." Students would be learning from nine in the morning till nine at night, studying the philosophy and politics of social ecology, but also thinking about how we could apply social ecology to different areas of society.

Murray would come in to lecture on each Sunday. At that point he was quite old, and he would just come down for two hour lectures and for dinner. This is how I met Murray on my third day at the Institute for Social Ecology. I had never met a revolutionary, and I was just so enthralled with his talk that I followed him to dinner. I also dropped out of my NYU program right then and there, and decided I wanted to study with this incredible man. I followed him to dinner and asked if I could sit with him.

A number of us students sat around him, and I remember our very first conversation because it was about space, time and determinacy, and also about bigger questions around energy and the universe. It was metaphysical, but also quite a spiritual conversation. I have thought of this conversation often because Murray would often get accused of being anti-spiritualist and I felt that was really wrong. I felt like Murray had a sense of spirit, certainly of hope and possibility, but also an understanding of things beyond the materialist realm. Murray just cautioned that things that couldn't be verified empirically by citizens at large should not be part of politics. I felt like this complexity was often really misconstrued about Murray.

I studied with Murray for the next eight years. He was my thesis advisor for my Master's degree at the Institute for Social Ecology. He was so generous with his time. In addition to coming down and lecturing at the Institute for Social Ecology, he would often invite us to study with him in his apartment. I knew that he had been doing this for decades with students at the Institute for Social Ecology. I was late to that game. We would sit in his living room and discuss Hannah Arendt, Karl Polanyi, Marx and his own books. And he was such a supportive, engaged listener. He was so interested in building minds, building orators and building revolutionaries. And it's funny because I would argue against some of his own writing at times. I had critiques of some aspects of his thoughts on confederalism. I remember once writing a critique, and in the margins of my academic paper he had written "you are wrong." That was it. Just underlined "you are wrong." And I responded, "You can't say that. You have to come up with something other than you are wrong." I don't know that I ever budged any of his convictions, but I really appreciated his mentorship.

At the time, I was very active in the global justice movement. It was right around the time that the WTO was coming to Seattle and many of the students from the Institute for Social Ecology

went to Seattle as organizers. It was an incredible moment because we felt like the Left in the United States, which is, of course, often the last to come to a lot of ideas, was coming to the ideas of social ecology almost organically.

Many of us were there to help shape a more nuanced understanding of what we were up against, which, as social ecologists, meant looking at how Statecraft and Capitalism were colluding in this most egregious global institution to step on people's rights across the board. It was the perfect laboratory for teaching people about hierarchy in general and the call for direct democracy as an antidote. Everything from the chants in the street, *"This Is What Democracy Looks Like,"* to the pamphlets we were putting out, were very much informed by social ecology.

I remember coming back east as we organized a confederated Direct Action Network, initiated in part by social ecologists around the continent. I was so excited for the movement to have Murray as a seminal thinker who could lecture to the thousands of young people in the United States who were suddenly turned on to the ideas of social anarchism. It was pretty much right then that Murray decided to reject social anarchism, to disavow it and call himself a "Communist." While I understood his critique, it felt so annoying because suddenly we're in a place where we had such an opening historically for him to be popular. Part of me felt that Murray didn't want to be popular. Murray always wanted to push us beyond wherever we were at. It was a hard moment for many of us who had become socially anarchist because of his writing, and then suddenly we were losing Murray to a newer or more elaborate critique.

I studied with him until he died and I was actually with him when he died, for which I was incredibly grateful to his partner, Janet Biehl, for allowing a number of us to be a part of his full life.

I remember how he used to call me on the phone at my house on a landline back in the day, and I'd pick up the phone and he would say, "hello, daaawling, how aaare you?" in this amazing Murrayism. And I remember thinking to myself, I am so lucky to be in this man's life and I can't imagine what life will look like after he's gone. Oftentimes he'd talk to me about obscure European revolutionaries, either in the Russian or the French Revolution, whom I honestly had no idea about, and I would think to myself, there are so many people in this world who would wish to be on this phone call and I have no idea what he's talking about! I was more interested in talking philosophy with him, but a lot of the historical references were a little bit beyond me.

I actually thought of him – I believe Debbie Bookchin is with us on this call – but I too thought of him as a father figure to me, and I was just so grateful to have him in my life. So I just wanted to share those pieces of my reflections with you all. Thank you for including me.

Brooke Lehman has been either a student, facilitator or board member of the ISE for 28 years. A long-time activist, her main involvements have been with the global justice movement, Occupy Wall Street, Bluestockings Bookstore, the Solidaire network, and the Schumacher Center for New Economics. For the last decade she has been running the Watershed Center, a retreat and resource center for social justice organizations in the Hudson Valley region of New York, where she lives with her partner and 7 year old daughter.