**Transcript of the Out of Eden Learn Google+ Hangout with Paul Salopek, April 29, 2014**

Participants

Liz Dawes Duraisingh, Project Zero

Sean Walmsley, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Pam Sengos & colleagues, Wisconsin, US

Natalie Belli, Massachusetts, US

Kim Zimmer, Illinois, US

Jill Sheley, Washington, US

Tracy Crowley & Heather, Illinois, US

Dina Mueller-Rust, Stuttgart, Germany

Annie Salter Jarrett, Northwest Territories, Canada

Liz & Teachers: Introductions

[7:00]

Paul: It’s really a lot of fun to get to meet you guys finally. I’ve been following the educators’ Google Hangouts with Liz throughout, and I can’t tell you how much energy your students and your own efforts give me as I walk across the world. And what’s really delightful too is listening to where you all are from. I’ve been to almost everywhere that you guys are, either as a journalist correspondent or as a manual laborer. Marblehead is familiar to me because I worked out of Boston Harbor on fishing trawlers, Chicago of course I worked at the Chicago Tribune ... even the Northwest Territories where Annie is, I’ve been hunting up on the Caribou and Porcupine River and spent time with the Native American community investigating climate change. So it’s really fun I think it’s - you guys are *my* foreign correspondents and your students are my co-correspondents who are helping with your ideas, even helping me make my ideas better. Education was always going to be one of the main missions of the Out of Eden Walk - but it’s grown in importance as we’ve seen enthusiasm around the world percolate and bubble around this journey.  Just to give you a synopsis of where I am now, and then I’ll listen and try to answer questions and have a conversation about how I can help you. I arrived in Israel about two months ago, and I’ve been walking through the West Bank and through Northern Israel, and I’m now basing myself in Israel proper, in a coastal city where I’m going to be looking for a ship …  Basically what I’m doing right now is I’m setting up from a logistical base in Israel the plans and the routings for Year Two. After having spent the last year or 15 months walking out of Africa, crossing the Red Sea on a cattle boat, and then plodding up the coast of the Hejaz in Saudi Arabia - an extraordinary segment of the walk, I must say - then coming through Jordan, crossing the Jordan River Valley into the West Bank, walking through the West Bank in Israel, the plan now is to move into another continent. So I’ll be moving out of the Levant and moving into Eurasia, and eventually into Central Asia. And there’s a big obstacle on the way, which you guys have probably heard of, it’s called Syria. Which when I first conceived of the walk the plan was to walk through Syria - but the Civil War unfortunately - the enormous human tragedy that’s unfolded there - is making it almost impossible. So basically the plan now is to find another ship … this is another kind of obstacle along the way, as I’ve mentioned before, when human beings moved out of the African continent in the Pleistocene they encountered all sorts of physical obstacles. And I’m sort of matching that experience in a small way, in a micro way, by running into the political obstacles such as wars. And so to get around Syria I’m looking for a ship that will take me to Turkey. And the idea is to find a working ship, not a passenger cruise liner ship - actually a cargo ship - that I can work with the crew going across the Mediterranean and document their work and their lives, which is, again, part of this whole project. Spend the days and nights with the women and men who I’m travelling with. I think it’ll also be a fun segment for students because there’s nothing like the glamour of the sea - and I myself worked at sea for many years as a commercial fisherman in two oceans. So this will be interesting. And I’ll land, with a little bit of luck, in one of the Alexandrian ports established by Alexander the Great in Anatolia, then I’ve got another challenge - this time another land-based obstacle, and that is, how do I get on to the Old Silk Road headed into Central Asia? One of the routes is via Iran via northern Iraq, and that’s my preferred route because the culture and history are so rich there. The landscapes are extraordinary, the Zagros Mountains. There are still Eurasian cheetahs in Iran. There are these amazing enclaves of wilderness, which I think would be extraordinary to walk through and to share with students. Barring that, if that becomes too difficult, then I might have to continue north and route through the Caucasus, which is one wonderful consolation prize, because as you guys may know, the Caucasus are steeped in very deep history when it comes to writing, religion, culture, and migration. Extraordinary countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, etc. So that’s what I’m grappling with right now. And it’s a lot of logistical work. I’ve got help from some colleagues in the U.S. and National Geographic helping me out, and my own small community of the Out of Eden Walk. So right now it’s basically writing and poring over maps and making lots of phone calls and doing lots of reporting. And talking to you guys, which is great, because I don’t often stop this long and have the bandwidth to talk with educators. So I’m eager to hear your questions and your ideas and what you guys are doing with your storytelling. So thank you for all being here!

[13:55]

Natalie: Paul are there any females with you at all during these walks?

Paul: Yes, I’ve walked with women twice. Once in Saudi Arabia, for a couple of days, and I shared that on social media, but here I’ve had to be careful with what I share about people’s personal lives, in cultures where gender divides are so steep. I consulted with the woman who walked with me, she was an amazing person, she was a journalist, and I don’t think it would cause her any major problems, but it is just a bit culturally unusual for a Saudi woman to come walking with a Westerner - especially with two camels walking through the Hejaz Desert - it probably hasn’t been done in a century. And then, more recently here in Israel, I walked with a young woman who has just been discharged from the army. A young Israeli woman. And she’ll be featured in the upcoming dispatches. I hope to walk with a lot more. For better or for worse, I’ve been walking at the beginning of my walk through a cultural landscape where a stranger or a Westerner walking through rural communities - it’s been challenging to overcome that gender divide. I’m very much looking forward to getting over it - and I already have - you’ll see a lot more women in the dispatches.

Kim: Paul, you said poring over maps, and I just had this visual of you sitting at a table - how important is the physical map in your journey, as opposed to what our students know, which is Google Maps and Google Earth? We pull out the globe a lot when we’re learning about where you are, and I actually have students look at the globe as opposed to just zooming in on it with Google Earth, so can you talk about these maps that you are speaking of?

Paul: Yeah, I use all kinds, Kim, and I love physical maps. Because I grew up with them - I’m of that generation - I drew my own much as your students have, the students involved in the Out of Eden Learn platform. I loved drawing maps as a kid. That said, I do use an awful lot of digital mapping, I’ve got some really wonderful resources with National Geographic as you might imagine - and also at the Harvard Center for Geographic Analysis - my cartographer Jeff Blossom is helping me visualize some of the digital journeys and themes. I use everything. I will say - this may seem unexpected - I try not to look at maps too much. I am trying not to pre-plan my routing to such a degree that I get locked into it. First of all it’s just impossible because the world throws curveballs at you every single day, especially when you are on foot - rivers are too high, or, a border closes, or your camel goes lame or what have you. And so you can’t make an iron clad schedule or follow a line on a map. What I’ve been trying to do, because it helps the storytelling, and it also helps me keep loneliness at bay - and it’s also just a wonderful experience of the walk - is I stop and ask directions constantly. Constantly. It’s a way to engage people in the walk, it’s a way to get them to talk about their own physical landscape, and often their political landscape, their emotional landscape. So this exchange of information verbally and even through sign language. I’ve been - I’ve walked through cultures in the world where say a Tarahumara Indian from northwestern Mexico, who doesn’t speak Spanish very well, or is too shy to speak in Spanish, I’ll ask him “Dónde está  XXXX, dónde está este pueblo?” and he’ll know what I’m asking and he’ll know I’m asking directions to a village called XXXX , and he will turn and raise his hand and flick his wrist casually in what will seem to be a random direction but I’d be very quick to take a compass coordinate off of those flicking wrists because they were accurate to within a degree. You know, sometimes, they didn’t explain the giant mouthing canyon between me and the destination but at least I had a compass bearing. So I ask a lot of directions and it’s part of the fun.

Dina: My grade 2 children wanted to ask you, will you be visiting any schools?

Paul: Yes! The plan is to be visiting schools as often as I possibly can, and I’ve visited schools along the way - I started visiting them, Dina, in Ethiopia and I visited my first one in a town called Asaita in the Horn of Africa. I’ve visited several in Djibouti, others in Saudi Arabia, I spoke to universities in Jordan, and I’ve spoken a couple times to a school in Ramallah in the West Bank in Palestine. So, the object is to hook in as many schools physically, with my appearing before a classroom as possible. Sometimes the technology isn’t quite up to snuff - I think it was Annie who said she had challenges with that as well - some schools don’t have the bandwidth to support electronic interactions. But it’s something gratifying to see, for example, that Sean is with us, and that’s a school that I spoke with in Riyadh and it’s delightful because then I can have a human connection, not just a digital one, with the students.

[20:25]

Dina: And I suppose with all the different schools there’s something about that common humanity of children and that human contact that you’ve had with the different schools - is there anything that you can share with us that was special to you? Sort of commenting on humanity there?

Paul:I think you guys would know as well as I from the Out of Eden Learn platform that students and children are interested in other children, they’re interested in what they’re learning and what they’re doing, and that’s always great fun. Children are often the first ones to come out and greet me when I walk into a community. When I’ve been walking into an African village or I’m walking into a Bedouin camp in the Hejaz, it’s the children who have come out and trot alongside as I’m plodding ahead through the sand. They often are the ambassadors for their families, for their community. Sometimes they take my hand and walk with me. I had a very funny interaction in Ethiopia with a group of kids, they were Afar nomads, and I used my satellite phone to hook up to a school, I believe in Chicago, if I’m not mistaken, and it was hilarious because the kids in Chicago, I think it was cold and snowy - and they were asking their Ethiopian counterparts - “What do you guys like for breakfast?” Those kind of basic interactions. And the Ethiopian kids were very confident, they were not in the least intimidated. They kept repeating, in a kind of lawyerly fashion, “Well what do you guys know about Ethiopia? What do you guys know about Ethiopia?” (Paul laughs) and I thought it was great. A lot of fun.

Dina: Thank you!

Tracy: We’re planning for our next school year already, since we only have a couple weeks left. Do you have any suggestions, either regarding the Out of Eden Learn project, or other information we’re just doing with our kids regarding the walk, as far as different ideas, or a way to deepen these plans, or anything going into Year Two, any ideas for us as educators, to make the walk even more integrated into what our kids are doing?

Paul: Yeah I think this notion has been floated earlier about actually taking special times to allow the school kids to actually steer my reporting is very much on the forefront of my mind. I just have to get to an area where a) that’s practical to do - there aren’t political constraints or security constraints - and b) it’s a part of the world where there’s something - there’s some learning moment in it - something about history, something about culture. I think Turkey will be a really interesting place to do this. It’s such a crossroads of ancient migrations, there are amazing ruins dating back to the hunter gatherer era and the origin of different kinds of organized religion … there are all kinds of issues like social justice issues, there are land use issues… environmental issues as well. I think what I’d love to do, I need your guys’ help to organize something because I am aware that there are privacy issues with some children. They have to be protected online and I don’t know how much identity issues or security issues constrain this interaction. But to basically set up a date with schools and say ok, Paul is going to be walking this week - he’ll be leaving point A in Turkey - and give them a menu of possibilities - or even better yet, let them research their own possibilities of where they want me to walk. And then when I get there, what they want me to ask. So it becomes much more interactive, giving something back to the students. I would be willing to do that. You know, I can’t do that every week, because my main job is as a journalist, and I’ve got my own workload and deadlines to meet, but I’m willing to do this on a regular periodic basis, if you as educators see value in it …  Maybe you can have assignments based on the reportage that I give them or they can add to it with local angles. Some of the footsteps are making the global local, right? So I think we can tap into those.

25:27

Natalie: I would just like to concur as far as being more involved with some of the schools and some of the kids - I think that’s something too that my children have been asking for and they’ve been incredibly curious about education and especially in very very rural areas. As far as kids learning and learning without the typical resources that we have here and what that looks like. And also in our classroom we talk a lot about the power of a story and the power behind different perspectives and I just love the idea of interacting in a more intimate way with our classrooms, too, Paul, and our kids and I know as teachers for a lot of us there’s a lot of different signage that goes on with parents as far as internet safety/internet policies, but I know in my class at least I’ve got kids signed off already on being able to participate, which is actually really nice because sometimes that can be an obstacle for people.

Heather: I think another powerful thing that can happen that would allow you to be connected without having to be connected live with classrooms is just letting the kids know about the things you’re struggling with along the route  that you could use their help with. For example, as you were talking about mapping out your next route and identifying the challenges along the route or having to re-route around Syria, I think giving the kids that problem and letting them explore route options for you, and kind of plan and get back to you would be another example of ways to get the kids and the teachers involved. And I was just thinking of that as you were talking.

Paul: I think Heather that that’s a terrific idea as well. There might be some real time implementation issues given the very fluid security situations on the ground which I can only hope that the kids would understand that I might not be able to implement their routing say around Syria - but I think that giving them that problem, and then me interacting with them to the degree that it’s appropriate to basically brainstorm with them I think would be very fun, very cool.

Pam: I know that our students have really enjoyed, like for Footstep 4, where they were doing interviews with their parents or relatives that audio segment that you did on tips for a good interview and just being silent during the interview, that was powerful stuff coming from you.

Paul: That’s great, that’s terrific. And I have to remind you all that I didn’t take a single journalism class in my entire life, I’m self-taught, so I’m all for getting pearls where I can get them.

Sean: You know what would be interesting, I often think about Forrest Gump when I think about your walk and how people just started following him, right? And I wonder, would there be opportunities for people to - students, adults, professionals, whoever - to join you in like a day or an extended period of time - imagine you had a group of kids who wanted to go on an extended camping experience or something like that - that would be really cool. I know that there would obviously be difficulties to organize and plan, but it could be really cool.

Paul: Yeah Sean that is a good idea. I think it’s one that we thought about from the beginning and we’re still trying to figure out how to make it work. Because as you might imagine, given the parts of the world that I’m walking through, even the insurance issues of - you know - there will be a lot of flat, safe places to walk through for the next 30,000km, but it’s getting kids on a plane and travel insurance, Nick Kristof does this with university students who enter a contest - for those of you who don’t know, he’s a very popular columnist with the New York Times - in global affairs, and he solicits essays from college students and the winner gets to travel with him for a week or two in Africa or Malaysia or what have you. We were thinking about how to do that, and we actually get solicited with requests for that from college students, not yet from elementary or secondary schools, all the time, and if you guys have ideas about how we can possibly overcome some of these technical or logistical hurdles for say taking students along the trail somewhere - you know I’m open to that suggestion.

Jill: Paul I can answer that or just an idea - I think when you get to the West Coast of at least the American continent, it might be easier. I mean you’re going to go right by where we happen to live. I wondered the same question if you could take on walking parties with you at times. It may get easier in more populated areas.

Paul: Yeah, Jill, I think you’re right. I think once I hit North America, a lot of that issue goes away. As you guys might imagine,  just the global scale of the walk, I’m trying to figure out ways to get local school children to walk along. When I walk along through northern India, it would be great to get kids from one village to walk with me to the next. That certainly could be done in Washington, where by the way I worked as a manual laborer on construction on XXXX Island. I think, you know, it’s this long distance transport that Sean might be thinking of is more the hurdle - I think more locally a lot of those problems go away. And you know, had I better connections Sean in Saudi, I would have invited Saudi students along through Jeddah Province and whatnot but it was just really difficult with the Saudi education system.

Sean: Yeah I understand that.

...

Liz: One person is asking if you know where you’ll be in the world this August.

Paul: Yeah, probably Turkey. Turkey’s a big place. So I’ll probably be approaching one of the eastern borders of Turkey.

Liz: Great. And then I have another question: I’m a photography student in Utah (so we’ve got students watching I believe as well as teachers today) I was wondering how important photography is as an element of the walk?

Paul: For storytelling purposes in this day and age it’s hugely important. I mean we’re a visual species by evolution. I mean since the beginning our brains have adapted an enormous amount of their raw power if you will to binocular vision. And I think that as a learning tool has only increased with the advent of the information revolution. So I think imagery is huge. I’ve used many different channels on the walk - including students - I must say my heart is in the longer form writing - I’m a writer, that’s what I do - but I have learned and I’m learning that we can use things like social media almost subversively to get people to read longer work. You know I post one image a day on one of our Twitter feeds. And it provides a visual heartbeat to the walk when I’m busy writing a story that sometimes might take me a week or so. So visuals are huge. They are providing the beadwork along this strand of pearls if you will that keeps readers engaged in the linear events of the walk through time and space. Some readers need that, others don’t. Others are perfectly happy just to read the dispatches, which is sort of the way I envisioned the walk. The dispatches are more impressionistic, they’re more emotive. They’re more issue driven, they need less connective tissue, they’re meant to stand alone. So that said, we’ll be experimenting with more photography, including more interactive photography that invites the public to submit their own photos. We’re now building a milestone page for the public - so that they can put their own photos on it - their own portraits - and answer the three questions about human identity that I ask every human being that I find every 100 miles and that will be fun. We don’t know how to adapt it for students yet because you know these social media platforms have restrictions for people under 13, so if anybody has ideas on that.

Sean: I actually have an answer to that one. With my class I use social media sites but I’m the owner and I’m the overseer of the social media. So I give them permission to use the sites under my watchful eye. And if they ever misuse it, then I can remind them of our expectations. But that means that I’m allowing kids at 10 and 11, to Tweet and Instagram, and to follow your Twitter account and your Instagram feeds - even though they’re under the age limit. But that’s because I’m watching and I’m supervising it. So that’s one of the workarounds that I found. I find that the kids love the opportunity to engage on those social media sites.

Paul: Great, it sounds like curating is one way to go. I know that the popularity of the Instagram account of the walk has just exploded - it’s approaching 10,000 followers now - so let me share that insight with my own curator at MIT.

[Tabbatha and Lora introduce themselves]

Lora: ...You had posted a video about a butcher and his family celebrating the end of Ramadan which I plan to show my students. I love the little videos - it really brings that culture into my classroom, in a way I could never do even with Youtube.

Paul: Thank you. Those videos - I had to be reluctantly dragged into shooting them, because again I’m a writer not a videographer or cameraman. But the videos are very popular and I love them. I especially like the little glances on the milestones that are produced by Patrick Wellever at MIT, there will be more of that. And I know that at a Google Hangout one of the teachers said it could really empower students by having students make videos of their own lives. So that they can post them and you know swap them - biographies and cultural elements and of course build storytelling skills. That is just really exciting and I’d be happy to facilitate that in any way I can.

Tabbatha: Would that be something that we could possibly put those video snippets together so that we can share them with you so that you can share them with children in different countries?

Paul: Yeah I think that’s one easy way to do it. You’ve got to remember that my exposure to kids is microscopic compared to the reach of the platform. I meet hundreds of kids a month, but how many do I sit down with a laptop in a school setting and show them something? It’s probably a dozen or so, not that many. I’m thinking we have to … and Liz you need to come and konk me on the head because you’ve got research protocols that you have to observe. I mean how do we devise a teaching platform or any platform rather, where these can be shared, so that I can come in and ideally comment, I can give encouragement, I can offer insight, but even have the kids curate these videos. Have them themselves judge them, have a jury of students, have them award themselves something. And I’ll be happy to contribute where I can in terms of my participation. I think that would probably reach far more kids than me carrying videos around in my rucksack with a laptop and projecting for them - though I’m willing to do that as well.

Liz: We have no problem with kids in principle taking videos, but not really of themselves so much, so I think in some ways by putting up some creative constraints, it might actually be very generative for kids because certainly kids in the West are in this moment of the “selfie” and all about putting pictures of yourself on Facebook. I’ve been hearing from kids in the interviews that they *like* the anonymity of Out of Eden Learn - that’s kind of what makes it a bit different because kids can explore ideas, they’re not having to put themselves upfront so I don’t see that as a problem actually. If they were doing videos that show their lives, it wouldn’t have to be one about them in their bedroom showing off their stuff - it might actually push them to think in slightly different and creative ways about who they are and where their lives are. So I think we could definitely, I mean we have the capability on Out of Eden Learn it’s built in there for them to upload videos. I mean, we can definitely go there. And then the other piece is that I’m really happy to see that there’s been a real uptick in classes Skyping one another, having Twitter feeds to one another, being in touch with one another, and as long as we’re not organizing that and we’re not recording it and using it for our research, that’s fine. I mean we don’t want to be constraining the educational possibilities of Out of Eden Learn because we’ve got research regulations to follow here at Harvard. So I just wanted to put that out there, that’s my perspective on it.

[44:41]

Paul: Yeah, Liz, I think just to follow you, I think that’s an interesting idea, you know, making the constraints on privacy a benefit. Certainly some of the best writing takes the cameras as it were off the narrator and that would be an interesting challenge for kids.

Kim: And I think you kind of already did that too with the taking neighborhood walks. My students got the camera in their hands and the first thing they wanted to do was take pictures of themselves. But then we had to kind of rethink that - what’s the goal here and it’s really to show people where we live and to take a slow walk through our neighborhood, and to notice things that we don’t typically notice. We notice each other every day because we go to school with each other - but what are those little things around our neighborhoods that we haven’t really noticed? And my students learned more about the two-block radius of our school just taking that walk than they ever had going to school here for four years. So I think in little ways it’s already sort of happening.

Paul: Wow, that’s amazing. That’s actually wonderful and heartening. The enhancement of observational skills in that way, that’s great.

Pam: And if I can chime in with Kim when we did the neighborhood walks the kids drew their pictures or their maps but then using a tool like Voicethread that’s not giving their picture, took out those privacy concerns, but their voice - some of these kids are not so great at writing but they can articulate a story and the depth which we got from the students from their stories just using their voice was very powerful.

Paul: I think that would be a lot of fun. And given how visually driven youngsters are today, I think they would really excel at it. And Liz and I have been talking about ways - you know, a sidebar conversation - about how to make the Out of Eden Walk experience more interactive generally for adults. But one of the things Liz brought up - or maybe it was Shari - was to just drop off some cameras at every milestone and let students document their lives. This has been done in Nairobi and other places where the occasional philanthropies have given disposable cameras to kids who are living in those settlements and they’ve produced extraordinary work - just amazing work.

Lora: You know, my class just did that Nairobi Kenya with the cameras. We were studying the United Nations and they had given cameras to a little girl named Molly and she documented her world in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya. And my students loved that. They were so involved in that.

Paul: And Lora, having that inspire your students to do something similar would be very powerful

Lora: I think so too.

Paul: You know in a fantasy world - and Liz has probably heard a lot of these ideas from me that aren’t practical - but one of the legacies of the walk is the community that we’re going to leave behind long after I hang up my boots in Chile in 2020. And I think having a gallery - a video gallery, a photo gallery, of students’ work that’s permanent, that is archival, that lasts for generations, that can be archived along with the milestones and the other storytelling content would be a very rich layer to add to the walk. Very valuable, that’s very lasting, students 20 30, 40 years from now may be looking at it.

Jill: I want to pass on a question my kids had for you personally, is how are you feeling? How are you holding up? How are your feet?

Paul: Oh Jill thanks! I had a problem with a lung infection a little while ago but that’s been overcome with masses of antibiotics. I was in the great hands of Palestinian doctors in the West Bank. I’m doing fine - so far no complaints from the knees or the feet. Probably the problems are on the other end of the anatomy with my head - I’m kind of a slow writer. I need these neurons to cooperate and pull in the same direction for constructing workable sentences. That’s probably the biggest challenge I still have.

Heather: Paul, speaking of your feet, my students really want to know how many pairs of shoes you’ve gone through, and how many you think you plan to go through?

Paul: Yeah I can answer half of that question! I’ve gone through two pairs so far. And they’re just off the shelf Merrell hiking shoes. And how many I’ll burn through is unknowable because I think I’ll be wearing sandals, and Chinese sneakers, and whatever is available at the local markets in Turkey and Uzbekistan, and who knows where else. I went through one set of Ethiopian plastic sandals - the ones I wrote about - fairly quickly. I might be wearing mukluks in Siberia. Who knows.

Liz: Paul I have another question, this one from one of our participating educators Chris Sloan. He’s asking, when all is said and done, what do you hope to accomplish with your walk seven years from now? So when you reach the end, what do you hope you will have accomplished?

Paul: Well that’s easy. It’s a very selfish answer. I hope to be a better writer. This project is a very long, laborious, complicated construct to become a better writer. And what I mean by that is also a better thinker and a better feeler. And I might even stretch it a bit to say a better human being. I live through my writing. My writing is how I connect with people, it’s how I filter the world - how I filter people’s pain, how I filter people’s accomplishments - that’s what I do. I was writing my first narrative when I was six or seven years old in the form of comic books that I was then selling on the street corners of Zapopan,Mexico where I grew up. And I think the power of the story - I was just reading Alex Kotlowitz, a Chicago journalist who wrote a terrific book called “There Are No Children Here” and he was saying that the act of storytelling is in itself an act of hope. And I think that pretty much, Alex pretty much encapsulates what is one of the central strands of the walk. So for Chris in Utah, that would be my answer.

Liz: Paul, I think you chose to answer that question on a more personal front, but I just know from my conversations with you that you - and you even spoke today about the legacy of the walk. This is not just your, you know, your private self-improvement project. It certainly means more than that to all the educators who are here. So, if we were to broaden up the scope of your answer, what would you hope would be the impact of your walk on other people?

Paul: Yeah, I was being a little selfish there wasn’t I? (laughter) The walk proceeds, any creative project, proceeds on many channels, many levels, and the first one has to be personal. And beyond that, it’s enhancing, of course, it’s basically it’s extending what I’m trying to do with my own work, to others who bear the impulse to be creative - and that’s across any sort of endeavor. Including reading, reading is huge for me. I think it’s - I worry about attention spans. So I’m using the notion of a quest, this very old storytelling trope, probably one of the oldest in the world, going back into stories we told around campfires, to basically see how I can hold people’s attentions and in particular students’ attentions so that they’re not overwhelmed with this tsunami of information that is bombarding them incessantly from all sides now more than ever before in the history of our species. So the walk’s narrative, a seven-year-long kind of long way of thinking, long way narrative, is an attempt to try to hold their attentions through stories so that they know, so that they themselves can construct stories about their own lives that have beginnings, middles, and ends. I think we all tell ourselves stories about who we are, whether questions about identity, questions about origins, questions about where we are all going. I think the walk is a vehicle - a storytelling vehicle primarily, for all of these questions. There are fascinating and exciting new channels opening up maybe regarding community engagement - I’m talking to people right now who are saying let’s use these issues you’re writing about - climate change, hunger, economic inequity, conflict - to actually hook up not just school kids but adults in these communities. Find local champions as it were who can then share information and their resources about how to improve their lives. And using the walk that way, as kind of a force for good practically and not just journalistically, is an emergent aspect of this project. But basically it is, so far, about storytelling and education. It’s about holding a vision of where we’re sort of all going more than just for seven seconds or for seven minutes but for seven years. You know it’s interesting - it’s a laboratory in that way.

Pam’s colleague: I’m wondering about Paul as a writer. Do you decide what you’re going to write about for the day - if you have categories of which you kind of pre-plan what you’re going to observe. I’m thinking about humor in different cultures. Does what one culture thinks is funny, does another culture think it’s funny? If it’s a universal language of humor? Or how do you go about describing what you’re going to write about and then observe it?

Paul: Good question. I’m thinking about if I were an educator, how I would begin to explain that to schoolchildren. It’s both. I think the reporting process that works for me is learning enough about an area and a human population to know more or less what questions to ask and what the big issues are. But not over-research it or over-report it so that you have tunnel vision and miss stories that are serendipitous, that happen by accident on the side, which are often in retrospect - and I’m not being romantic here - they often are really the best stories. So it’s being supple. I think having a good grounding, doing lots of reading, lots of reading about history, about current events, about science, and then using that as a launch pad to see where the trail takes you. And it can take you deeper into those issues or take you to completely new ones. Often it’s a mix.

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Paul: Thank you very much, it’s been great talking to you, a great morale boost...