



• Creativity • Collaboration • Continuity • Community

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LET'S FOCUS

CHANGING MENTALITIES ABOUT HUNTING

Every year around the time when the so-called "hunting season" is supposed to start, Lebanon goes through the same rehearsed melodrama:

Act 1, the "sportsmen" shoot hundreds of birds, even endangered species, with total impunity then show off their kills on social media pages where they compete with other "sportsmen". Act 2, this upsets the "environmentalists" who care about the environment; they won't stand for this.

It would seem like the lines have been drawn and the rules of engagement have been set, right? Wrong. If only things were that simple. In the legislative vacuum that governs much of the social, economic and political aspects of life in Lebanon, the rules are rigged before anyone even decides to get in the game.

The futility of trying to change things becomes all too apparent in Act 3 where everyone argues until they are blue in the face but ultimately nothing gets done. For the grand finale, hunting season ends and everyone goes back to being best buddies and complaining about other pressing issues: electricity and water shortages, the price of gas, inadequate infrastructure, the rise in school tuitions, etc.

To many who see this state of things, the picture could appear hopeless. Anarchy rules as "sports" shops compete to sell more guns and hunting gear (which don't come cheap, and which is ironic since as soon as the hunting season is over, people go back to complaining about the cost of life). More birds are shot senselessly - even as "hunters" notice the drop in bird populations.

But there is light at the end of the tunnel. By draining resources, threatening bird wildlife with extinction, damaging crops by increasing the number of pests and polluting the environment with garbage, empty cartridges and wildfires, hunting has become too big a problem to ignore. Slowly but surely, concrete positive action is being undertaken and mentalities are evolving.

A grassroots movement is emerging among nature conservationists who seek to educate the public about the rich diversity of our birdlife and its importance to the environment and agriculture. *Bona fide* ethical hunters are becoming part of the solution as more of them become conscious of the need to maintain healthy bird populations for the sake of the environment and the sport.

In the words of *Doctor Mounir Abi Said*, the champion behind the Aley Animal Encounter wildlife conservation center, "Hunting should be solved with the mind, not the heart" (see our report on Page 4).



Advertising hunting equipment is glamorized unethically and irresponsibly



Bird massacres leave lasting traces - here, countless cartridge cases in the Lebanese forests were collected by this committed environmentalist

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LET'S FOCUS

TOWARDS ETHICAL HUNTING IN LEBANON

Fouad Itani is a rare breed in Lebanon; he is an ethical hunter. Yes, hunting and ethics can go together - provided the government enforces hunting regulations. Indeed, after reading Fouad's article below, you will realize that ethical hunting not only prevents the wildlife "slaughters" we witness today, but also ensures a balanced ecosystem is maintained. Since he has made it his mission to raise awareness of endangered bird species and ethical hunting practices, Fouad has largely traded his rifle for a camera and works on documenting bird species in Lebanon and making them more known - particularly those listed as protected species.

Due to its wide diversity of habitats and its location on a major world bird migratory route, each year in the fall and spring, hundreds of thousands of migratory birds fly over Lebanon. These birds sometimes spend weeks here, attracting bird watchers and a few hunters, but also, unfortunately, unethical shooters and poachers.

Coming from a long line of ethical hunters in my family, I learned a lot from my elders about wildlife preservation and hunting ethics. I truly believe that hunting has deep cultural and biological roots. But in a country that still lacks the implementation of proper hunting laws and the basic awareness tools for young and future generations, I find myself obliged to conduct my own modern research and create my own personal code of ethics.

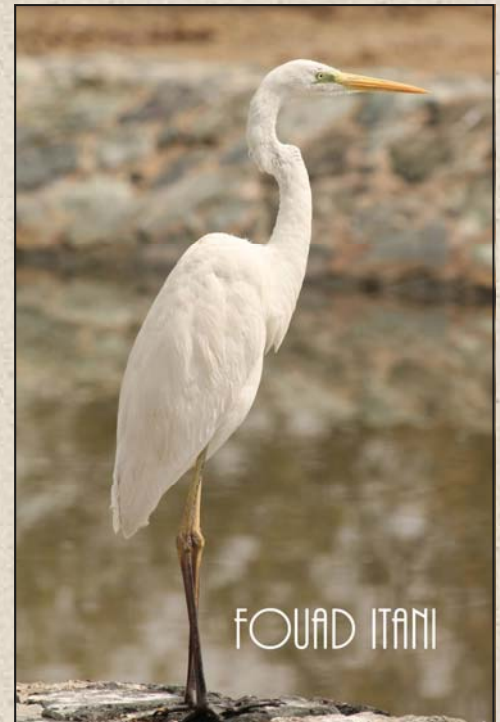
Out of the 395 migratory and resident recorded bird species known to Lebanon, only 14 are considered game birds, i.e. birds that can be legally hunted under proper regulation during hunting season. They include certain species of ducks, quails, thrushes, partridges, doves, larks, finches and waders.

Contrary to common belief, hunters are actually scarce in Lebanon. What we have in abundance are senseless shooters and poachers that harm our fauna and flora and make real hunters look bad. In this category, you can find reckless shooters as young as nine-year-old kids with automatic rifles that get involved in a number of unethical practices from trespassing on properties, to using their firearms close to residences and plantations, and leaving behind their empty cartridges and other trash that constitute environmental hazards. More importantly, they shoot without discrimination or restraint both beneficial birds that help control and sustain the ecological balance (such as storks, cranes, swallows and martins), and migratory soaring birds (such as vultures, eagles, and falcons - some of which are globally threatened species). Most of these shooters are unable to identify the birds they shoot, many of which are often endangered species. These birds are being killed in the thousands and their killers proudly post photos of their "achievements" on the internet. In this category we also find poachers - some of them in their eighties - capturing and trapping songbirds resorting to illegal practices such as nets, glue sticks, and machines that mimic bird calls, to then slaughter the birds and sell them to restaurants. All these people have no respect or regards for birds and their mating seasons, nor for hunting seasons and laws, nature, private property, or the safety of others.

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Endangered bird: Pallid scops owl (*Otus brucei*)



Endangered bird: Great white egret (*Egretta alba*)

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UPCOMING EVENTS

"INTRODUCTION TO BEEKEEPING" WORKSHOP



OCTOBER 12, 2014
10:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Saidoun village, Jezzine

Theoretical and practical approach to beekeeping, the importance of bees for the environment and human health

<https://www.facebook.com/events/380918152060222/>

"FETE DES POTIERS A BKERZLAY" BKERZLAY POTTERY FESTIVAL



OCTOBER 18-19, 2014
10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Bkerzlay - Baakline, Chouf

Exhibition of different pottery techniques and creations by local artists

<https://www.facebook.com/events/351685111679527/>

SAMIR & CLAUDE ABILLAMA ECO-ENTREPRENEURSHIP AWARD



CALL FOR PARTICIPATION NOW OPEN

American University of Beirut

\$20,000 prize for new, creative environmental projects with a positive impact on Lebanon

<http://aub.edu.lb/units/natureconservation/programs/eco-entrepreneurship-award/Pages/index.aspx>

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In order to engage in basic ethical hunting practices, create awareness and ensure the sustainability of the sport I've started shooting non-game birds with a new kind of gear; a camera. It was at that time that I started thoroughly researching and reading more about these birds, as well as observing them to understand their behaviors and their habitats. Now I feel that I'm making the transition from a non-game birdwatcher to a true birder. I first started posting my photos on some Lebanese hunting and environmental groups on social media. I introduced these species to newcomers to the hobby in order to give them a better idea about those birds, their beneficiary roles and their conservation status. I also joined discussions with administrators and members on Facebook groups, introducing many of them to the concept of "fair chase" (a style of hunting in which the prey has a chance of escaping death), "bag limits" (a restriction on the number of animal in a species that can be killed), "respect for nature", and "respect of private property on which they hunt". Thankfully some members started slowly making the transition from shooter to hunter, reassured that they could continue having the opportunity to hunt, to be outdoors with nature, to conserve wildlife and still bring home some game at the same time.

Throughout the years I've been frequently asked and questioned by friends about how hunting is beneficial for nature and how, as a hunter, I am strongly promoting bird conservation. My answer would always be that every hunter is well aware that without habitat preservation there would be no habitat and without habitat there would be no birds. So if birds are hunted irresponsibly they will not be available in future hunting seasons.

Many might argue that birding and hunting are incompatible, but in reality many birders are excellent hunters and many hunters are strong conservationists. I am living proof of this. People love nature in different ways, but it is clear that hunters cannot be considered only as enemies of birds and nature. In reality their regulated actions could help preserve healthy ecosystems, once our government finally implements the Lebanese Hunting Law.

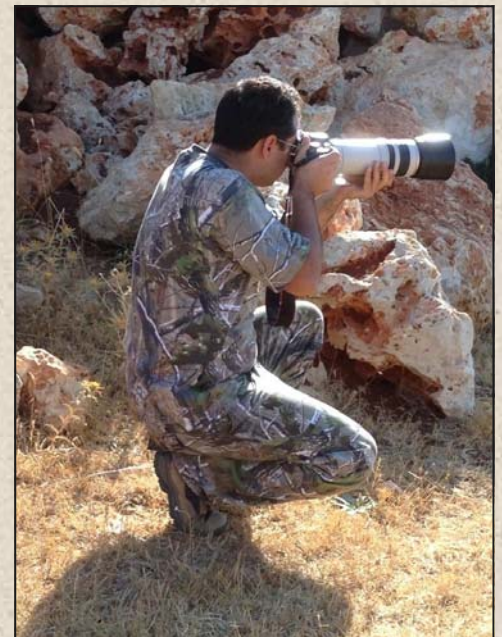
In countries with developed regulations where hunting laws are implemented, hunters purchase a hunting license and pay taxes on hunting guns, ammunition and other hunting-related equipment. All of this money is then used for wildlife research and protection, the reintroduction of species, and the preservation and improvement of wildlife habitats. These efforts and initiatives are beneficial not only for birds but also for a wide range of species that aren't hunted but are ecologically important. Controlled hunting also removes the less adapted birds from an ecosystem, leaving the strongest and smartest ones to produce and maintain healthier generations. Furthermore when hunters rent lands for quail hunting for example, the landowners could make a profit from wildlife. Thus they will be less inclined to invite more environmentally destructive sources of income from rock mining and wood logging on their property.

"In a civilized and cultured country wild animals only continue to exist at all when preserved by sportsmen. The excellent people who protest against all hunting, and consider sportsmen as enemies of wildlife, are ignorant of the fact that in reality the genuine sportsman is by all odds the most important factor in keeping the larger and more valuable wild creatures from total extermination." - Theodore Roosevelt

Shared by Fouad Itani



Endangered bird: White stork (*Ciconia ciconia*)



All photos courtesy of Fouad Itani

To see more of Fouad's amazing photos and discover the incredible diversity of species found in Lebanon or migrating over the Lebanese territory, visit the Facebook page:



Birds of Lebanon and the Middle East
<https://www.facebook.com/birdsoflebanon/info>

HUNTING LAW VIOLATORS PROSECUTED!

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By Bassam Al Kantar, originally published in Al Akhbār: <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/216723>

The Minister of the Environment and Minister of Justice **took action** against an individual who published a video and photos of himself and others violating the hunting law by killing **over 800 birds** in one day, **300 endangered rollers and orioles**. A lawsuit was filed with the Attorney General for the Environment in Mount Lebanon, and recommended a sentence of one month in jail and a fine of LBP 500,000 (around USD 335) for each violator.

Since the hunting season wasn't officially open yet, the hunting ban was still in effect. Also, in 2002 Lebanon also joined the **African-Eurasian Migratory Water Birds Agreement (AEWA)** protecting endangered species like rollers and orioles. Finally, the **Hunting Law 580** (voted in 2004 but not yet enforced) forbids displaying dead birds or animals outside cars or in public.

At the very least, this is a moral victory. Violators will not stop illegal hunting as long as the law is not enforced, but they will think twice before showing off their kills. Hopefully this will help reduce the appeal of hunting as a "sport" and will start changing mentalities.

Reported by the Editorial team



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AUB NATURE CONSERVATION CENTER TALKS ABOUT HUNTING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

On October 2, 2014, the **Nature Conservation Center** at the **American University of Beirut (AUB)** held a panel to discuss the effects of hunting on the environment with **Dr. Hyam Mallat**, a specialist in Lebanese environmental law, **Dr. Mounir Abi Said**, founder of the **Aley Animal Encounter** wildlife conservation center, **Dr. Riyad Sadek**, a specialist in Ecology and Evolution, and special guest **Myriam Klink**, a singer and vocal animal welfare activist.

The image of the “**Lebanese hunter**” is in need of serious redefinition. According to the panelists, there are around 300,000 hunters in Lebanon, coupled with more than 300,000 unethical shooters and poachers - more than the environment can handle. Loss of biodiversity results in the proliferation of pests and large-scale damage to crops. Another harmful by-product of hunting is the pollution caused by heavy 4x4 vehicles and the huge amount of empty cartridges that poison the soil with lead and plastic. Despite the fact that Lebanon has joined several international hunting and environmental conventions, lack of enforcement of the Hunting Law (one of the best drafted laws in the world) follows the pattern of other legislation in the country that remains ink on paper. Most drastically, the absence of town planning is destroying huge chunks of wildlife habitats and turning them into concrete wastelands.

What we need now is a paradigm shift from the bottom up. Change starts at the individual level and creates a culture of the environment. There is no lack of good intentions and the will to make a change, but there is a sense of frustration among young people desperate for guidance and looking for concrete solutions. Once again, this is a mirroring of the wider problems we face in our Lebanese society at large. Without capable institutions to nurture positive civil and environmental action, we need grassroots movements and self-governed responsible communities to fill the gap and achieve something.

Dr. Abi Said concluded on an optimistic note, citing the growing number of animal lovers and activists that join his efforts in protecting orphaned and injured animals, as well as children and young people who visit the center to learn more about our rich local wildlife.

Reported by the Editorial team



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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

PERMACULTURE PRACTICED WITH LOVE IN AKKAR: EARTH BENCH, HUGELKULTUR

When I come down from **Akkar** in North Lebanon and talk to friends in Beirut, they are curious about what I've been up to there. I usually don't feel like I can adequately articulate all the different experiences I have on any given day in Akkar, but one thing I can say for sure is that when I find some extra time I tend to fill it up with **fruit-drying**, **composting** and **scavenging used tires** from neighbors. The first two might sound like reasonable activities to you, but you might ask: “what about the tires?” Am I planning to contribute to the next road block? Not at all: I am acting on the newly energized call in Lebanon to do **permaculture**!

Tires can form a great skeleton for structures made of earth, and in Akkar it has been benches. It's a simple concept: arrange tires in a bench-like structure (at a height of 2 tires). Fill the tires with non-degradable waste, rocks and soil, and slap on some cob (soil, water and straw mixture). But be careful! You need to know your local soil well before you build with it. To find the best ratio of soil, sand and straw for your building material, it is good to test different ratios of these elements in small blocks and let them dry to see which one holds together best.

The first time I carried out this project last summer I carefully measured out proportions of sand, straw and 2 different types of sifted earth that I found on and around the site of the developing “**Ayoun Center**” in the mountains above the village of **Michmich**. I chose the best soil and mix ratio, enlisted some helpers from the village and we got to **mud slappin'**. Some grew disillusioned with my mud games, wondering why we didn't just use concrete. In the end it was the wonderful children of the *jurd* who showed the most faith in this fun activity and saw it through. The sad ending to this story is that I didn't get a chance to weatherize the mud benches with recycled cooking oil and turpentine before winter came, so when I came back this year I found the tires lying mud-free in a pile. My partner in the Ayoun Center project had removed them and the spot where we had planned to build them was covered with concrete.

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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

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This time I gave the benches idea another shot at as part of a **permablitz** at the **Peace Center** of an NGO called **Relief and Reconciliation** in **Bkarzla**, further down toward the coast from Michmich. Like any permaculture project you try to carry out in a different location, it was challenging because of different available materials and different people involved. This time a Syrian friend of mine named *Sabiha* offered to take the lead. Sabiha has lived and worked in Bkarzla for many years and is a wonderfully animated woman who knew exactly where to find the white soil we needed. She was confident that this white soil simply needed some straw and it would be good to go. In fact, she had made one of the walls of her modest home using this same method.

We collected the white soil at a large limestone outcrop on the side of the road. After sifting the soil, we mixed it with straw, poured some water on it in the same way one would prepare cement with a shovel, and danced some barefoot *dabke* on it to mix it. Sabiha started expertly slathering the mud over our tire skeleton and we followed suit. The next day we added another layer of mud and a very important cement barrier (decorated with scavenged tile fragments) at the contact point between the ground and the tire bench wall. This prevents the bench from eroding away during heavy rains. Another volunteer then treated the bench with a mixture of turpentine and used cooking oil I had collected from one of Bkarzla's lovely riverside restaurants. As we were finishing the first mud layer on the tire benches, reinforcements arrived to help carry on the Peace Center garden permaculture make-over.

The next project was a hugelkultur bed, something I had done twice before in Lebanon. Once at the 2-day Introduction to Permaculture course organized by SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon in Saidoun, and again at the Ayoun Center. Hugelkultur beds try to recreate unique organic conditions in a forest floor: large decomposing logs covered by soil and organic waste that provide vital nutrients and foster the proliferation of microorganisms, all improving the texture and water retention capacity of the soil. The degrading wood and compost provides much appreciated air pockets for roots and the topography of the bed creates different microclimates that help us diversify our plantings! Most of the wood we used came from a cherry plum (*janerek*) tree. We added smaller branches and twigs, compost made from months of scraps from the Peace Center and nearby vegetable market, cut grass (nitrogen rich), dried grass and corn husks (carbon rich), and soil (including a nice spongy soil substrate made of leaf detritus that looks like chocolate cake when it is compressed to plant seedlings at the nursery).

The second team to offer their support for the permablitz was made up of Syrians with an agricultural background from the countryside of Al-Qusayr. Although they have been uprooted from their home soil and diverted from plentiful clean water from the Orontes river that flowed alongside where their homes used to be, they have managed to find some small ways to keep growing and living as before. The small refugee camp they have made for themselves is full of green herbs and plants. Still, they had a very hard time this year growing food in the small plot allotted to them next to the camp for lack of irrigation water. Perhaps this idea of hugelkultur that requires less water was planted in their minds - perhaps they will try it out for themselves. I know for sure that they have the ingenuity and work ethic to make amazing things happen despite difficult circumstances. We planted a few cabbages, cauliflowers, cucumbers and tomatoes for our first crops, and also gave some sprouts to the participants to plant in their camp. While I'm not in Lebanon, teams of volunteers from the Peace center will look after the bed and seek to integrate garden education in their work with kids of different backgrounds.

This experience was a wonderful example of collaborative effort utilizing materials and techniques that were found in a Lebanese village. The NGO Relief and Reconciliation would love to continue to develop this land as a permaculture site, so if you would like to lead a project there please contact them! Remember that you will always have friends there to lend a hand and welcome you to Akkar with arms open wide.

Shared by Greg Shaheen

"Writing from Philadelphia, USA, with my heart in Lebanon"

The website for Relief and Reconciliation: www.reliefandreconciliation.org
Greg's blog where you can read more about his activities in Lebanon:
www.levantineshaheen.tumblr.com



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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

SALIM ENFORCES WASTE SORTING IN RABOUEH

By Adelaïde Duchet, originally published in L'Orient le Jour Junior
<http://www.lorientjunior.com/article/699/salim-pratique-le-tri-a-raboue.html>

New tenants have moved into a building. Quiet and demure, they are role models for efficiency and welcome recyclable waste. Meet Salim Khalil, the person behind this project:

3 recycling containers recently took up residence at the foot of a building, thanks to a young Lebanese man who returned from Canada where he used to sort his waste on a regular basis. "I had a guilty conscience when I found I was throwing away recyclables," Salim confesses, "so I contacted the **Arcenciel** NGO. I knew this organization was active across Lebanon. I was also won over by the fact that its income from selling recyclable materials is reinvested in its social projects." Salim's project kicked off on the first day of Spring, perhaps also marking the rebirth of an environmental conscience. At any rate, it is a very welcome initiative.

COLLECTION BY ARCENCIEL-

Every 15 days, Arcenciel collects number 1, 2, 4 and 5 plastics (these numbers are inscribed in a triangle at the bottom or back of plastic products) - which means no plastic bags; metals (soda and food cans); cardboard and paper excluding greasy (pizza boxes) or dirty (tissue paper) ones. And what about glass? Not yet. The organization has also supplied the building with 3 large plastic containers for common use, and cardboard sorting boxes for each apartment, along with instruction pamphlets to go with these.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SORTING-

First, the initiative needs to be properly presented to the building's residents. They learn about the advantages of recycling and the requirements of sorting waste (rinsing all items well). The cost of the sorting boxes and pamphlets is very reasonable and comes to a total of around \$15 per family. All it takes is to send email to the organization (christ.sarkissian@arcenciel.org), submit an agreement form and specify how many families in the building wish to take part.

Salim's tips: The rinsed metal waste collected in homes should be frequently moved to the common recycling bins (outside the apartments) to avoid insects or odors inside the homes. It is also necessary to regularly encourage residents to pursue their efforts.

FIRST STATUS REPORT AFTER A FEW MONTHS-

As agreed, Arcenciel regularly comes to empty the containers. "My family and I faithfully continue sorting. The neighbors are also participating but I am disappointed when I sometimes see tissue paper, glass and plastic bags dumped with the sorted materials. I always reenlist the building's caretaker who assists me in my tasks, but I am also aware that every person needs some time to acquire the basics of sorting. I am confident," says Salim before concluding: "I want to follow through on this project but I also want to go further on the personal level, particularly in terms of consuming more sustainably."

THE ADVANTAGES OF RECYCLING-

- Reduces the strain on Earth's natural resources such as trees cut down for paper and water used in its manufacturing process: 10 kilos of recycled cardboard helps save 230 liters of water
- Reduces energy consumption in the industrial and transportation sectors, which helps limit global warming
- Reduces incineration and reduces landfills, both of which pollute the air and the soil
- Reduces manufacturing costs by making raw materials readily available

Translated by the Editorial team



GREEN RESOURCES

BUSTAN QARAAQA - TREE MANUALS



Downloadable resources about trees and reforesting deserts in Palestine

<http://bustanqaraaqa.weebly.com/publications.html>

AUB NATURE CONSERVATION CENTER



Downloadable manuals for planting trees and holding eco-activities for children in schools

<http://www.aub.edu.lb/units/natureconservation/library/Pages/manuals.aspx>

ASSABIL - NETWORK OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES



Find out where the nearest public library to you is located, donate or borrow books, or take part in activities

<http://www.assabil.com/index/>

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH

You sent us your submissions and you voted for your favorites. Here it is, the PHOTO OF THE MONTH:
To send us your photos, email us on contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com



Osprey (Pandion haliaetus) landing

Photo by Michel Sawan

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Michel-Sawans-Photography/683327678390908>

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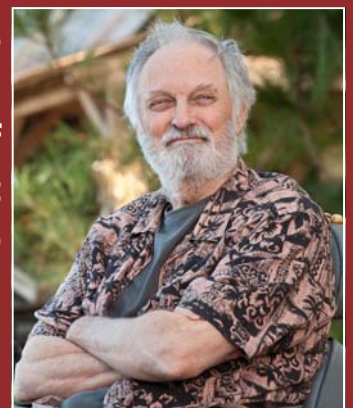
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A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

"You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. What you'll discover will be wonderful. What you'll discover is yourself."



—Alan Alda

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