

I've never met Paulus anywhere but in my imagination. He died six months after I heard about him for the first time. The New York Times obituary was my second notification of his existence. I was eleven-years-old when the right taillight of his Volvo Amazon winked west for the open and unknown road to San Diego in 1974. The previous year my teacher had asked me to write an essay about what I wanted to be when I grew up. I knew of conservationists. I was interested in saving the world. I wrote my essay and drew a cover of cattails and a Saskatchewan sunset. The typewriter paper blazed with color.

Years went by. Soon saving the planet was outdated like vinyl records and picnics. I came of age in the 80's. The 60's and 70's had been relegated to old clothing styles and interesting poster fonts and album covers. Art, for me, became the way to save myself, and I hoped it too might save the world. But before long that passion was scooped into the machinery of university institutions, careerism, and a form of abject poverty. Kurt Vonnegut said if pharmacy students got degrees, in the numbers that BFA and MFA students do, but graduated to find out pharmacies didn't exist the universities would be charged with fraud. But the way of the soul does not account for such trivial matters. But Vonnegut says the students demanded places for creative writing and artmaking because soul needs a place to grow. Religious institutions had failed in a different miserable way. I was searching for spirit too. The conditions for creativity are the mycelium underground joining the nutrients of the living earth with the living sky. However, when the materialism and careerism that drives our world infects the studio and writing table, the fragile life of something trying to grow is stunted.

My partner Tom sent me a copy of Lewis Hyde's "The Senses of Penland" essay and, later the obituary. The next month I arrived at the Ceramics Research Center. Garth Johnson handed me a copy of Paulus' *Finding One's Way With Clay*, and M.C. Richard's

Centering, and the 1,367 cassettes of Gerry William's Studio Potter interviews that I would digitize over the next two months. The digitization project was an act of gratitude for the ceramics community. And Paulus was now a lifeline.

I've now been holding onto that line for three years following it back to my roots. I'm "digging" for the essential truth of what creative experience, soul, spirit, and science feel like through my creative practice as a writer in *Dig: Paulus Berensohn, A Natural Life*. If I had known about Paulus in my twenties I'd have a completely different journey. In Paulus I found someone who had learned how to integrate body, soul, mind, spirit, and science into his creative life with the language and intention I'd been seeking but could never find in any of the institutions, professors, art programs, books, articles, or churches I attended. I could find all of these things, but in separate places. And I could be any one of these ideals – artistic, spiritual, or cosmological – but never all at the same time. If I tried, the results ended up clumsy, ineffective, and misunderstood. It's true that Paulus was on the fringe of all these mindsets, but that's what's so perfect about him. If you make something out of fringe it's called a selvedge. It's solid. It isn't going to fray. I can see what Paulus offers is real, and true, and it's a guide.

And I'm writing *Dig: Paulus Berensohn: A Natural Life* as an offering to someone like Bill P. who reached out to inquire about my study and work on Paulus. Someone like Bill seeks to understand how an authentic life can encounter and overcome crisis. Making objects from clay, textile or wood is an intimate placeholder in a world gone wired and wild with grief for lack of true relationships while at the same time we are technologically connected to the whole planet. Bill too recognized that in a profound way Paulus can tell us how to heal our ravaged psyches that in so many ways reflect the ravaged planet we are now on.



Paulus was a pure unbounded self, unfettered by a sense of inadequacy or failure, and therefore freed from dependence on the false claims of technocracy. After his Silver Sword visionary experience, stitching in anonymity for eight years in California offered no reward but the present moment. If consumer societies become enamored with having enough, excesses will dissolve, along with institutions that perpetuate a sense of lack. False claims of security are no longer mechanisms for control. The suicidal commonplace eco-irony is to give up because we think we can't do enough, so we don't do anything at all. But everyone can find their "silver sword" and red thread. Craft becomes a pattern of kindness. Peaceful action can offset the addiction to technocratic mass production and runaway economic growth. It's bountiful to hold a thread and weave a line of countercultural integrity. Indra's Net is also a tapestry. The craft arts are patient. And long suffering. Harmony is natural.

Berensohn's life is his greatest artistic achievement. He held the heart of the world in one hand and his pipe in the other. He pumped blood iron stardust through veins of ink, yarn, and the capillaries of clay particles. These practices were the medicines he imbibed and prescribed. All matter was his companion. The vast cosmos did not terrify him. Paulus was humorous. Curious. Fearless. Generous. Sincere. He was a dancer, ceramicist, and a fairy god-father. Paulus was also a deep ecologist. He was a mystic, a writer, and a philosopher. I cannot tell the story of his relationship to craft and how it saved his life without telling the story of how his life was formed and folded and challenged by the historical influences of minds like Newton, Jung, and Bohm. To understand Jung and the roots of the counterculture you need to reach back 5000 years to the Egyptians and the Greeks. Hermetica was the first new age, and we've never left it. The mystical and magical is the alchemical right of every human.



Dig is first and foremost about the man, but my story becomes intricately woven to the settling ethos of the countercultural revolution, and the burgeoning awareness that Mother Earth had been wounded by the runaway success of rubber and gas, in the same way that Paulus had been wounded by the runaway success of *Finding One's Way With Clay*. In both cases there's no one to blame. Earnest inventions are hallmarks of the homo sapien.

Dig, it turns out, is also a story about both my grandmother Mary, who was a Polish immigrant to Canada in the 30's, and an Eurasian Eagle Owl/Angel named Susannah. When Susannah "appeared" and offered to narrate the story by telling about the period when she was "assigned" to guide and to guard Paulus I thought "she" offered an interesting and imaginative narrative device. The prospect also provided a creative challenge for me. Paulus, I knew, would approve. What I did not anticipate was finding out that Susannah and Mary were feminists. They apply their feminist lens to the misogyny of Jung, the Babylonian history of transgender angels, Paulus and his inquiry into the expression of male and female, their own sexuality, and me.

In many regards I find I am working on a Gobelin tapestry. I thought I was working on a colorful four-color placemat. There have been ample serendipities all along that continue to provide the support and guidance for my choices. I trust that. Jocelyn Arem, my teacher for the Archival Storytelling course I attended through Creative Capital said watch for the serendipity. Trust your intuition. She said many other things, but these were words that aligned with Paulus.

Paulus wanted to connect a culture to the craft of clay. Henry Ford wanted everyone to have a car. Paulus connected. Ford provided. But the demands, pressure, and speed have overtaken judgment. In 1975 Dr. Wallace Broecker was the first scientist to connect emissions of CO₂ with rising temperatures. Berensohn's life careened close to the edge of the road and he was faced with possible extinction. Our species shares the same self-imposed likelihood.



It is not a writerly spin fostering my work as a storyteller to connect Paulus and the ecological challenges we face. *Dig* becomes my co-creative effort to join Paulus and complete my ten-year-old career aspiration and “sense the way in which we are being played through (kidnapped) by a dynamic larger than our personal needs – chosen by the earth, for instance to serve her, to help her heal in this time of escalating eco-catastrophe” (Berensohn, 1992). Through my research I’m coming to understand the forces that hobbled the prescient and significant steps of the deep ecology movement of the 70’s. Thirty years have waylaid us but that twisted u-turn can straighten out. The global family is coming to the table. We can raise our handmade goblets and toast to a clear and harmonious future. We must.

It is a different form of intuition and imagination to suggest that Bargello tapestry can save the planet, but Paulus himself says, “My intuition is convinced that working with primary materials (clay, fiber, wood, glass,) and working with them in a mode that rounds us out, softens our heaviness with life and gives us the opportunity to slowly withdraw our projections.... Possibly had I submitted to the recommended surgery, I could have gone on with my life, but that dynamic state of body-mind from which the symptoms arose would have been left intact” (1989).

The example of Paulus is the present-day alchemical Hermetica necessary for the transformation and radical change we desperately need. Greta Thunberg speaking at the Brilliant Minds conference in Stockholm told her audience, “I know we need a system change rather than individual change. But you cannot have one without the other” (2019). Paulus’ past is our future. Intuition, for Paulus, was the sister of imagination. He said it comes into us from the fuller landscape of being, before it can come out of us. The rare talent of Paulus was to trust both.

