



## Henry Mathews Award 2013

### Laudation for Paul Corbit Brown and Keeper of the Mountains Foundation

by Barbara Happe

Board Member of the Association of Ethical Shareholders Germany

Consultant on banks at urgewald e.V.

*You must be able to tell people stories, because stories tell you about life and life connects us and fascinates and touches us deep inside.*

Dear Paul,

it is a great pleasure for us – Ethical Shareholders of Germany – to extend to you and your organisation *Keeper of the Mountains* the Henry Mathews Award 2013 for shareholder engagement.

During the shareholder meeting season 2013 you brought pictures of the destruction of your homeland in the US American Appalachians caused by coal mining into our hearts and into the assembly halls of stock corporations, and you did it in a strongly captivating and very authentic way. Members of the companies' boards were shocked, employees shivered and shareholders felt affected and were silent when they were listening to your speeches. However, at some shareholder meetings you had to endure insults or boos from shareholders, who didn't want to hear of all this „environmental and human rights stuff“. You braved all these things and you ventured into the „lion's den“ with conviction. Your mission was always clear to you: „The truth is the only thing the powerful of this world really fear. And that's the reason why I am standing here: to tell you about the true conditions in my homeland.

Paul, the next few minutes are dedicated to you and your fellow campaigners from *Keeper of the Mountains*.

Let me tell the present audience about your life: Paul Corbit Brown is from a small coal mining area in the South of West Virginia. He comes from a traditional mining family: for several generations all the male family members have been working as miners. Paul was the first one who decided against this life design and completed an apprenticeship as a photographer. Quite soon he realised that he didn't want to use his talent to make money or to win fame, but instead to use his photographs to tell stories and to show people the living conditions in his homeland.

„Photography can make a difference“ – is one of your statements.

For almost 20 years you have been documenting the impacts of mining in your homeland, the US American Appalachians. But that's not all: you and your fellow campaigners from the foundation *Keeper of the Mountains* – you guys tirelessly campaign against the destruction of the beautiful mountains of the Appalachians.

These mountains have been destroyed by an extremely violent coal mining method: it is called Mountaintop Removal. First the trees are cut down, then the mountaintops are blown up until the coal seam is exposed. While the miners remove the black gold and wash it the “waste” – trunks, rocks and soil – is thrown in the nearby valleys and pollutes creeks and rivers. Many mining areas extend over chains of mountains. Thousands of square miles of land and more than 500 mountains have been destroyed by Mountaintop Removal in the meantime.

Your mission is to inform the local population about the devastating impact of the mining, on both the environment and also on the population's health, and to motivate them to join you in standing up for sustainable ways of living.

Paul, you are setting a good example: you lead a withdrawn life in the woodlands in your homeland, you have constructed a house from recycling materials, you are self-sufficient in power, generating renewable energy, and you cultivate your own food.

Five months have passed since you came to Europe to spend 40 days with us visiting ten AGMs in five countries! Nobody has managed to visit so many international AGMs before, not even members of the Ethical Shareholders.

During your stay in Germany, Italy, France, the UK and Switzerland you achieved incredibly much. You did everything to organise as many meetings as possible. You held talks with members of the German Bundestag and shortly afterwards you gave press conferences. You had information events and you visited open-cast mining areas, and one AGM after the other. And with the same conviction you told people about the problems in your homeland, standing up for an end of the Mountaintop Removal.

At the same time you have never lost your professional view through the camera and your passionate view at people who participate at the happening. You have the talent to document incredible things. Your way of looking through the camera makes your photographs memorials of the destruction of the Appalachians.

You have the courage to oppose the bewilderment and sometimes as well the indifference that the Mountaintop Removal has brought to your homeland.

With your power and untiring strength of will, you the members of *Keeper of the Mountains*, give a voice to those who suffer under the Mountaintop Removal.

The members of the management board, the supervisory board, and the shareholders were always kind of shocked, when you took the water bottle from your homeland you had smuggled into the AGM and poured it into a glass you had taken from the buffet and it turned rusty brown. Of course, nobody would drink this water any more ...

*But you not only urge the management board and the supervisory board to stop financing companies who do Mountaintop Removal supported mining. You also tell us to think about our life style and to live sustainably. To save energy, to live and consume differently and to spread the idea into the world.*

Your engagement at AGMs and your travels through Europe have clearly shown us how important it is to raise your voice for your own opinion, your fellow human beings and for the environment.

It is thus a very special honour to be able to hand over the Henry Mathews Award 2013 to you and the *Keeper of the Mountains*.

Because your stories, your engagement and your voices give hope and courage to change to all the people who are affected by mining.

I would like to finish my laudation using your quote:

Do not simply say, "Isn't that sad?", but rather ask yourself, "What can I do to change this, to make a better world, for myself as well as for all life on this planet?"