



In Memoriam

Professor Paul R. Ehrlich

May 29, 1932 – March 13, 2026

Bing Professor of Population Studies Emeritus, Stanford University

Dr. Paul Ehrlich is gone. He died on March 13, 2026, at 93 years old. In his passing, the world has lost one of its most passionate, most honest, and most stubbornly hopeful voices — a man who spent more than seventy years telling us the truth about the planet we inhabit, even when we didn't want to hear it. For those of us at WVD, we have lost a friend, a champion, and an early believer who showed up for us before we had fully found our own footing.

Over a career spanning seven decades, he became one of the most cited — and most debated — scientists of his era. His 1968 book “The Population Bomb,” co-authored with his wife Anne H. Ehrlich, was a lightning bolt. It forced the world to confront a question it had been studiously avoiding: what happens when a species outgrows its home?

He was called an alarmist. He was called wrong. He was also, in the ways that matter most, profoundly right — not about every prediction, but about the underlying reality: that there are limits to what this planet can sustain, and that ignoring those limits is not optimism but denial. What made Paul remarkable was not just his willingness to say uncomfortable things, but his refusal to give up. He never stopped writing. Never stopped teaching. Never stopped believing that the right story, told with enough passion and enough honesty, truly matters.

That shared belief in working towards a better future is what brought him to us and us to him.

When we launched World Vasectomy Day in 2013, we had an improbable challenge— a documentary filmmaker and a urologist trying to start a global movement that would inspire men to rise up and share responsibility for family planning as an act of love for themselves, their families and our future.

The skeptics were plentiful. Paul Ehrlich was not among them. He was there. He understood immediately what we were reaching for: not a campaign about fewer people, but a movement

about men stepping forward, about shared responsibility, about love expressed as action. We shared a deep concern for the future of this planet and all the living beings who call it home. That shared concern was the ground on which our friendship was built.

In November 2018, five years after our launch, Paul sat down and wrote a letter — not a formal endorsement, not a boilerplate testimonial, but a real letter to “my fellow humanity.” It was urgent and funny and heartbreaking and hopeful, all at once. It was pure Paul. That letter meant an enormous amount to us. It still does. We include it below in full, because it deserves to be read again — and because it is, in so many ways, his voice at its most characteristic: unsparing about the scale of the problem, and insistent that giving up is not an option.

What Paul understood — and what we at WVD have always tried to embody — is that the path forward runs through human relationships. Through couples talking to each other. Through men deciding to show up. Through communities building a different kind of story about what it means to be strong. Through organizations finding common ground and working together in pursuit of a shared mission. He agreed that men who choose a vasectomy are “leaving a legacy of hope and possibility for future generations.”

Paul is survived by his wife and lifelong collaborator, Anne H. Ehrlich, their daughter Lisa, and a global community of scientists, advocates, and ordinary people whose understanding of the world was forever changed by his work. He leaves behind a body of scholarship that will be argued over and built upon for generations. And he leaves behind, for us, the memory of a man who looked at the “mess we’ve made of this planet” and decided, every single day, that the right response was not despair but effort.

We are grateful for his voice. We are grateful for his trust in us. We will carry it forward.

— Jonathan Stack and Dr. Doug Stein, Co-Founders, World Vasectomy Day
March 15, 2026

In his words: A Letter Written in Support of World Vasectomy Day

November 10, 2018

To my fellow humanity,

The press is full of stories about problems caused, at least in part, by the conjoined but unmentionable ‘twin elephants’ of population growth and overconsumption. Yet, spiking food and energy prices, water shortages, increasingly severe weather, the rise in the rate of extinction, melting ice caps, dying coral reefs, worldwide toxification, disappearing polar bears, collapsing infrastructures, terrorism, the rise of fascistic leaders, and novel epidemics are almost never connected to these seemingly invisible ‘elephants.’ And while science has long proven there are limits to sustainable human numbers, and to humanity’s aggregate consumption, those limits are never discussed, and politicians believe in the oxymoronic statement, “sustainable growth.”

*Will technology save us? It can help, but its record is generally dismal. When *The Population Bomb* was published 50 years ago, there were 3.5 billion people, and we were called alarmists – the glib response was that technology could feed, house, clothe, educate, and provide great lives to ‘even’ 5 billion people. Nuclear agro-industrial complexes or growing algae on sewage would feed everyone. Well, they didn’t. Instead, the roughly half-billion hungry people then have increased to about two billion hungry or micronutrient malnourished today, and a couple billion more are living in misery.*

Why don’t the growth maniacs stop asserting how many billions more people we could care for and focus first on stopping population growth and giving decent lives to all the people already here? And spare us that old bromide about how the next kid may turn out to be the Einstein who saves us; considering the rich-poor gap, it’s more likely to be an Osama Bin Laden bent on destroying us or a Donald Trump fueling them with hatred.

Over the years we’ve come to believe that more information or more science is not enough to convince the world to leap into action. Our best hope lies in the universality of the internet and a story to galvanize people into action. Therein lies my support for WORLD VASECTOMY DAY. Jonathan Stack and his team of creative storytellers combined with Dr. Doug Stein and the more than 1,000 providers who together create more impact than a book’s worth of angst filled quotes.

They have grown since I was there for their 2013 launch. We give thanks to the 120,000 men and counting who, figuratively speaking, are putting their balls on the

line for MOTHER EARTH. In sacrificing what we hold most dear – the ability to make new life – in exchange for protecting the life that already exists, both human and otherwise, we leave a legacy of hope and possibility for future generations.

People have asked, can vasectomies really make a difference? Mine made a big difference in my life. I ended up with one child. The exact number Anne and I wanted. Why vasectomies? It is estimated preventing one unintended pregnancy equals 28 lifetimes of reduction, recycling and reusing and 100,000+ vasectomies reduces the planet's carbon footprint by billions of tons, enough to reforest a good chunk of Haiti.

Can we save the world?

Look, we are facing millions of years of evolution where 'survival of the fittest' defined our evolutionary progress – it depended on outbreeding others. In light of that, can we turn things around without a cataclysmic event? I don't know, but like me, I hope you'll agree that we can't give up.

So, join us on WORLD VASECTOMY DAY. Be part of a global conversation about our collective future while men everywhere begin stepping up our efforts to participate in creating a more hopeful future.

Yours truly,

Professor Paul R. Ehrlich

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