

THE COMOX VALLEY CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLES (3)

About A Community Climate Change Culture

When I read the very scary reports of scientists about climate change and hear some of the predictions of a possible Sixth Great Extinction I'm reminded of a favourite *New Yorker* cartoon.

It shows the Grim Reaper with his spooky hoodie, black gown and sickle over his shoulder knocking on an apartment door. The man who opens the door has this terrified look on his face. The Grim Reaper is handing him a note and saying to him, "Now don't freak out. This is just a save-the-date notice."

I'm not a "doomer" and I suspect you aren't either. But I do believe that climate change is the most serious challenge our world and civilization is facing. I also believe that we need to develop something that we can pass on to future generations. We need a community climate change culture.

Most of us tend to think of a community as a geographical location circumscribed by fixed boundaries—a city, a town, and so forth. The Inuit and Dene peoples of the Arctic were nomadic. They had to go where the food was. So they didn't think of a community as a specific geographic location. A traditional definition of community was "*An intimate relationship with all living things, both animate and inanimate.*" (The seeming paradox between animate and inanimate was probably for the benefit of us folks who didn't realize that all things are living.) So we must learn to think of community as a relationship not a place.

We are not using the word "culture" in the traditional sense—common ethnic origin, language, dress, customs, etc. We are using the word "culture" to refer to the way people develop shared values, establish relationships, receive and interpret messages, see and structure their world and give it meaning (context).

Why a community culture? Because people tend to live locally. Their relationships to earth are primarily local, families are raised locally. Parents often want their children to experience nature in their own communities. It is much easier to see the impacts of climate change at the local level. People are concerned about how their communities might be affected by climate change.

This got me wondering if there was an example of a community culture that changed my life, the life of my family and the life of the community around me...and there was.

I was born and raised in Toronto just before Canada entered World War 2 and was six years old when it ended. I have some vivid memories of growing up in the war years.

There was a driving, energizing force that bound us together. All of us were “doing our bit.”

I remember the ration books, the pictures of planes and ships that came in my parents cigarette packs; the war-bond posters; the war songs; listening to the war news on the radio each evening; the heavy, growling sound of the engines as the bombers passed over our community to help keep moral up.

I especially remember walking home from school one warm spring afternoon, turning onto our street and being shocked at what I saw. The street was going crazy. The neighbours were out on their front lawns hurling rolls of toilet paper up over the trees to neighbours across the street who would sling them back again. The street had a canopy of toilet paper streamers. I ran up to my mother who was on our front lawn right in the middle of the action. She was bending down to pick up a toilet paper roll to send it back on its way. I asked her what was going on. And she looked up at me with a broad smile on her face and tears in her eyes and said, “The war is over.”

There are helpful similarities between an energized community war culture and an energized community climate change culture. There are also differences.

In our part of the world there is no motivating “clear and present danger.” Unlike wartime Canadians we cannot automatically depend upon our existing economic and technological systems to help us. Some of them are causing the very problems we are trying to deal with. And we have no experience in a world that is enabling us to create irreversible transformations to the ecosystems we depend upon for our continued existence.

But we can develop a community culture. We can change our lifestyles, our systems, our values, and our relationship with Earth. And we can develop a spiritual resilience in our inner landscape to deal with the challenges in our outer landscape.

Every community culture must be inspired and motivated by a vision. We will discuss this in our next chronicle.

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