

COMOX VALLEY CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLES (4)

About a Community Vision

In my last chronicle I told the story about growing up as a small child in the World War 2 war culture in Toronto. That culture, like all viable cultures, had a vision.

If I had been older in those years, say a teenager, and went knocking on doors in our neighbourhood asking people what they really wanted, I'm sure I would have heard various versions of "We want Peace in the World." Peace in the world was a vision, and like all good visions it had the essential characteristics.

It provided a real alternative to the current bitter war situation—a better way of life, a better future for families, children and their children's children. This vision was realistic. It presented a real possibility, something "doable." It had the ability to energize, to motivate people to make essential and sometimes difficult but necessary changes. Finally this vision helped create a sense of community, an awareness that "we have to work with one another because we are all in this together".

When we don't have a community vision we have confusion. There is no clear picture of a better future that is realistic and do-able, no energizing force that helps build a sense of community and moves us to take action on climate change.

I'm not suggesting that there is no climate-related activity in our Comox Valley community. Many individuals and groups are engaged in protecting the estuary, streams and rivers, growing local foods that absorb carbon and reduce the trucking in of imported foods, cycling instead of driving cars, installing solar panels, and so forth. But what seems to be missing is a shared community vision to deal with the climate change challenge together.

There is a massive source of scientific information out there about climate change on a world-wide basis. But there is little practical information about what we can do about it at the community level. Fortunately some leaders have pointed out various aspects of a vision that can be adopted locally.

In the 1960s, long before our awareness of the full implications of climate change, Aldo Leopold, an early environmentalist, took some initial steps towards a vision in his 1966 book, *The Sand County Almanac*. Speaking about development he noted that "*A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.*"

One of the best visions I've come across has been put forward by Thomas Berry, a cultural historian and Brian Swimme, a mathematical cosmologist, in their book *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era*. They note that

we have come to the end of the Cenozoic Era (which began 65 million years ago with the death of the dinosaurs) and they predict that we are entering a new era they have called the Ecozoic Era (“eco” from “household” and “zoic” meaning “living” thus a “household of living things”).

The dominant and defining characteristic of this new Ecozoic Era is a vision: “*a mutually enhancing relationship between our species and Earth.*” It raises the bar way up. All Institutions--our governments, corporations, faith groups and citizen groups—must work together for the benefit of both our species and Earth itself. And though we may have many differences in our search for a common ground we must begin with the realization that we are all standing on it.

This vision presents a viable and realistic alternative to what we are currently doing to destroy Earth. It promotes a relationship with Earth. It creates a beneficial relationship between our species and Earth, and it facilitates the development of a human-Earth community. We and other species become Earth citizens.

But this vision is a real challenge. A few years ago, Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, always a realist, said that we know what we should do to protect the environment but we are not doing it. He noted how difficult the challenge is. He said, “*It is a long journey from the head to the heart and an even longer journey from the heart to the hands.*”

So how do we get from where we are now to where we have to be? I think we need to start with the three “Rs”: Relationship--awareness that we are Earthlings; Responsibility—we have a moral and ethical responsibility to care for Earth; Resilience a spiritual energy in our inner landscape to deal with the climate change challenge in our outer landscape.

In this climate changing world we need a shared vision to help us develop and maintain our community culture. In the next three chronicles we will discuss the 3 R’s’—Relationship, Responsibility, and Resilience.

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