

POWERFUL IDEAS,
PRACTICAL ACTIONS

yes!

FALL 2010

Share Your Stuff: Why Giving
It Away Gets You More

City Food: How to Grow
It Where We Need It

Can You DIY?
What Your
Grandparents Knew

Live in a Hand-Built,
\$3,000 Home
+ 7 More Resilient Ideas

Ready for Anything

Build Resilience Now
For Hard Times Ahead



David Korten: How to Get Free of Wall Street



Seeds of Resilience

Many of us live with a sort of schizophrenia as we try to reconcile our lives with what may lie ahead.

I sit behind my cabin and look up at sun filtering through the massive cedar trees and hear the same wind rustling the tree needles as has been heard for thousands of years. I have food to eat, a place to lay my head, and my family is safe.

But I know many others are not so lucky, and not a day goes by when I'm not aware of the crises we all confront as natural and social systems fall apart.

I'll confess that while YES! and others have warned about the crises for years, I didn't think they would converge so soon. We know the U.S. way of life is unsustainable. But many of us thought we still had time to move back from the cliff edge of ecological and social disaster.

I remember whispered conversations beginning some years ago among those who feared that we would do too little and act too late to stop runaway climate change. What would happen to coastal cities, food supplies, and fresh water resources on an over-heated planet?

Others weren't whispering—they were sounding the alarm. Twenty years ago, World Watch President Lester Brown, Al Gore, NASA climate scientist Jim Hansen, and others warned that the 1990s would be the decade to turn things around or face dire consequences.

More recently, it's become clear that there is another way our dependence on fossil fuels could lead to our undoing. The availability of easy-to-reach oil is on the decline. With increasing competition for what's left, this may mean the end of cheap oil, making it even less likely that we can go back to an over-consumptive economy.

We should be able to rally ourselves as a society to take on climate change, peak oil, and a stalled economy, and make the

transition to a sustainable society. But much of the media and government has been captured by powerful corporate interests whose influence hinders needed action.

So what are we to do in the face of these threats to our planet and to our lives?

This issue of YES! is about ways people are buffering themselves from the uncertainties of the times by creating more resilient ways of life. These people are starting urban farms, solar energy co-ops, DIY skill sharing, land trusts, and other projects. They're turning to each other for the sort of security they didn't find in over-leveraged homes and a speculative stock market.

While many of these efforts are still on the fringes, they are gaining support, even from those not normally interested in green living.

For a while yet, we may be living in a dual world. In one, business as usual continues, punctuated by increasingly turbulent weather and social breakdowns. In the other, we rebuild our communities and begin to build the foundations of a new world.

In the business-as-usual world, reactions to these changes may get increasingly bizarre as people blame everything from gay marriage to immigration for their insecurity.

But there are responses far better than blame. We can ground ourselves in the hands-on work of growing food, becoming energy efficient, generating green energy, and fostering relationships of respect and appreciation.

We don't have to wait for an election or a petition to sign. We can just get on with the community work that will allow us to live better, whether or not a systemic collapse happens in our lifetime.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Sarah van Gelder".

Sarah van Gelder
Executive Editor



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A Resilient Community

I7 GUIDE TO THE THEME SECTION



LANE HARTWELL FOR YES! MAGAZINE

THE MISSION OF YES!

is to support you in building a just and sustainable world. In each issue we focus on a different theme through these lenses ...

NEW VISIONS

Solving today's big problems will take more than a quick fix. These authors offer clarity about the roots of our problems and visions of a better way.

WORLD & COMMUNITY

New models that foster justice and real prosperity, and sustain the Earth's living systems. How can we bring these models to life and put them to work?

THE POWER OF ONE

Stories of people who find their courage, open their hearts, and discover what it means to be human in today's world.

BREAKING OPEN

Humor, story-telling, and the arts—taking you into unexpected spaces where business-as-usual breaks open into new possibilities

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With the economy still shaking and peak oil and climate change on the horizon, it's hard to plan for the future. Here's a no-regrets strategy for building resilience into your life. *By Sarah van Gelder*

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Transition Towns celebrate, get skilled, go green, and kick the oil habit.

By Mason Inman

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We're here. We're growing food in the city. And we're not going away.

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Invest in the sock exchange, share a bike, swap your skills, and reduce your environmental footprint.

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Take this test to find out.

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Stories that Light Up the Dark

What your ancestors knew can help you navigate today's uncertainties.

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PHOTO BY ED MITCHELL

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Care for and celebrate the places we share, and value what's free.

By Jay Walljasper

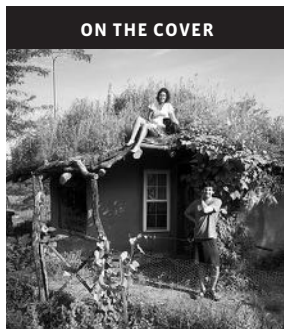
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How Kindness Trumped Chaos in New Orleans

Lessons of dedication, solidarity, love, and recovery, five years after Katrina. By Rebecca Solnit

Resilient Ideas

Eight ideas for building resilience from communities across the country: a hand-built home (p. 22), low-impact urban living (p. 24), bike as you are (p. 31), the general store (p. 38), process food locally (p. 38), bees on city roofs (p. 39), scrappy rebuilding (p. 41), making fruit public (p. 51).



Brian Liloia and friend Stephen Shapiro chose an early summer morning to photograph Liloia and girlfriend April Morales at their 200-square-foot cob house. See Page 22

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Free Yourself from Wall Street

How to avoid the finance industry's games and create real wealth.

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Can Mushrooms Rescue the Gulf?

Inventor Paul Stamets says mushrooms can eat oil, help clean up the BP mess, and rid the world of toxics—and he's got proof.

By James Trimarco



PHOTO BY RON WOLF

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READERS FORUM

Tell us. Send your response to an article, stories about making the world a better place, and ideas for connecting with readers to 284 Madrona Way NE, Suite 116, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110 or to editors@yesmagazine.org.

Dear Editor Ostrander
Your cover asked "will there be enough?"
OF COURSE NOT.
if the human race keep a-doubly (quadrupling) every century. Pete Seeger

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Water and population

It is utterly baffling how rudimentary mathematics is ignored in favor of "solutions" that adapt to and, consequently, perpetuate the fundamental problem (The Water Solutions Issue, Summer 2010). Why is it so difficult to address overpopulation? Is it too controversial? As a "progressive" magazine, you join the ranks of convention by ignoring the most blatant "elephant in the living room," adopting the iconic Western medical approach of treating the symptoms, not the cause.

JOHN RANKIN
Bothell, WA

The letter of the law

The Summer issue had so many interesting articles! My favorite is the interview with Robert Kennedy Jr. ("Citizens, Defend Your Local River").

I am going to give out copies during our Sauk Valley Open Forum meeting. We are a peace group that tries to educate ourselves regarding political issues, etc.

The Robert Kennedy article

shows us the way to help our rivers. He said that the "1888 Rivers and Harbors Act ... made it illegal to pollute any waterway in the United States and included a bounty provision that said that anybody who turned in a polluter got to keep half the fine." I hope the government does not take the law off the books!

INA BLADES
Sterling, Ill.

Power and justice

Thanks for your insightful article, Frances Moore Lappé. I think it is very useful to think about what causes our powerlessness. The article reminded me of a book by Starhawk, *Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority and Mystery*. She talks about three ways power is used: (1) power over; (2) power

with; and (3) power from within. And she provides lots of great exercises for groups and individuals to go through to see how power is working within these groups.

And I have also been thinking of another way people experience their powerlessness in our society—legal powerlessness. People feel powerless because they are. It is a lot more basic than some of the big issues of the day. People experience their powerlessness each and every day: when their landlord doesn't make the repair they should, when they are laid off without adequate compensation, when their credit card company dramatically raises their interest rates, when they lose their home because they don't know how to negotiate with a bank.

The reality is that most of us experience legal powerlessness because we get as much justice as we can afford. And with what attorneys charge now days, that's very little indeed.

PAT O'CONNELL
San Jose, Calif.

Meaningful work

Occasionally a human being is fortunate enough to find work with which he/she is able to truly make a difference for good. What a blessing your work is to



HEY, LOOK! THIS IS NO ORDINARY DULL WHITE PAPER WITH OCCASIONAL IMPERFECTIONS.



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the rest of us who have to postpone our search for meaning while we struggle for means.

My household has derived significant moral encouragement and regained some measure of faith in human decency as a result of reading your publication. This is no small task as I personally have become increasingly despondent with the noise of mainstream corporate-sponsored media, and the political economic machine that it supports. Thank you for that encouragement.

GEOFF MORRISON
Raleigh, N.C.

YES! in Arizona

I have been giving out copies of the YES! multiracial issue (Spring 2010) during the May 29 march in Phoenix, Ariz., and during the mural protest in Prescott. Many hardcore activists (both Spanish and English speakers) have been touched, but also a Prescott police officer who offered us protection during the protest and gave us a big smile after the YES! present and the mayor of Prescott (who has been doing not very progressive work around here) and his wife.

Muchos blessings,
PANCHO RAMOS STIERLE
Berkeley, Calif.

YESMAGAZINE.ORG

**GET MORE YES!**

Follow your favorite YES! bloggers online:



Author and YES! Board Chair David Korten on the new economy



Radical homemaker Shannon Hayes on sustainable living



Sheikh Jamal Rahman, Rabbi Ted Falcon, and Pastor Don Mackenzie on learning and teaching across divides



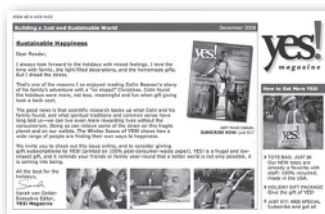
Writer and speaker Margaret Wheatley on perseverance in chaotic times

YESMAGAZINE.ORG/BLOGS

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Signs of Life

SMALL STORIES ABOUT BIG CHANGE



ENVIRONMENT

Canada Extends Conservation Area to Seafloor

👍 As the world watched the oil disaster unfold in the Gulf of Mexico this summer, Canada made history by establishing the first national park to extend legal protection from mountaintop to ocean floor.

The Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve covers about 2,200 square miles of the Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte Shelf, and extends 6 miles offshore and 2,000 feet below sea level.

The marine conservation area enlarges the existing Gwaii Haanas National Park, a sizable portion of the archipelago off the coast of British Columbia formerly known as the Queen Charlotte Islands and recently renamed Haida Gwaii, “islands of the people.”

The battle to protect what is now Gwaii Haanas started 25 years ago, when 72 Haida First Nation elders were arrested for blockading logging trucks en route to old-growth forest. Their actions brought international media attention. Working with environmental groups, the Haida nation eventually struck



PHOTO BY EDNA WINTI

A new conservation area extends the existing Gwaii Haanas National Park, in the former Queen Charlotte Islands, recently renamed Haida Gwaii, “islands of the people.”

an accord with the Canadian government to end logging and create a national park.

Since then, years of discussion among the Haida, Canadian government officials, scientists, environmentalists, fishermen, and a range of industries have yielded an unprecedented model for conservation—an equal partnership between a First Nation and national government

to oversee the area.

In the Haida language, Gwaii Haanas means “islands of beauty and wonder.” It is indeed a jaw-dropping landscape—a mix of fjords, mountains, tundra, bogs, and windy beaches. Conservationists have dubbed it the “Galapagos of the North.” It hosts at least 39 species found nowhere else, including a genetically unique black bear

larger than those in mainland North America. The marine area is home to sea lions, dolphins, porpoises, and humpback, orca, and minke whales. Gray whales stop there during the summer on their migration south. Haida Gwaii’s coast is also a significant nesting site for Pacific Ocean seabirds.

The conservation area allows limited fishing, tourism, and alternative energy development but prohibits oil and gas exploration. There is concern over the environmental impact of a proposed oil pipeline on British Columbia’s mainland coast that would increase tanker traffic in Hecate Strait east of Haida Gwaii.

Kristin Kolb is a freelance writer in Seattle, who directed communications for the campaign to save Haida Gwaii.

OIL

Canada-to-Texas Pipeline Plans Draw Criticism

👎 Citizen groups, members of Congress, and the Environmental Protection Agency are voicing concern over a proposal to build a three-foot-diameter crude oil pipeline that would stretch nearly 2,000 miles from Canada to Texas.

“MANY YOUNG DISABLED PEOPLE ARE GROWING UP WITH A MARVELOUS SENSE OF BELONGING, ENTITLEMENT AND PRIDE I NEVER HAD.”

Ben Mattlin, NPR commentator born with spinal muscular atrophy, celebrating the 20-year anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (passed July 26, 1990).



FRIENDS OF THE EARTH PHOTO

Friends of the Earth activists end a march from the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C., to the White House to tell President Obama not to approve the Keystone XL pipeline, which would pipe dirty, dangerous, and energy-intensive tar sands oil from Alberta, Canada, to Texas refineries.

The Keystone XL Pipeline Project, proposed by Trans-Canada Corp, would pump up to 900,000 barrels of crude oil per day across Alberta, Saskatchewan, Montana, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer, one of the project's supporters, claims that the pipeline could establish an "on-ramp" for Montana oil producers, generate tax revenue, create jobs, and reduce dependency on other parts of the world for oil.

Because the pipeline crosses the Canadian border, the U.S. State Department is charged with the project's approval.

The pipeline would carry oil extracted from Canada's oil sands, using a process that emits

high amounts of greenhouse gases, destroys boreal forests, consumes large quantities of water, and leaves behind toxic tailings lagoons, according to a University of Toronto report.

People living along the pipeline's planned route are worried about its effects. Dakota Rural Action, a grassroots family agriculture and conservation group, sent a letter to the State Department expressing concern about "the disruption of farming and ranching operations, the damage to roads, the risk of water contamination, and the risk of leaks and spills to the environment." Many also wonder how the pipeline will impact fragile ecosystems such as the Nebraska Sandhills and the Ogallala Aquifer, which

underlies 174,000 square miles and is an important regional source of potable water.

Grassroots groups aren't alone in questioning the project. In June, 50 members of Congress sent a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton requesting more information and stating, "Building this pipeline has the potential to undermine America's clean energy future and international leadership on climate change."

Henry Waxman, chair of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, expressed his opposition to the project in a separate letter to Clinton: "This pipeline is a multibillion dollar investment to expand our reliance on the dirtiest source of transportation fuel currently available."

The federal Environmental Protection Agency has stated

that the draft environmental impact statement, published by the State Department in April, does not adequately address the pipeline's potential greenhouse gas emissions, air pollutant emissions at refineries, safety and spill response, and impacts on communities, wetlands, and migratory birds.

The State Department is expected to respond to comments received on the draft environmental impact statement and release a final environmental impact statement before issuing or denying a permit for the project. No timeline has been given, but the decision is expected to come no earlier than the end of this year.

Laura Kaliebe is a journalist living in Seattle.

MILITARY

Maryland Protects Student Info From Recruiters

👍 Employment prospects for high school students after graduation have become increasingly uncertain. Vocational counseling services in most schools are hard-pressed or nonexistent. Many rely on a military aptitude test as an aid to vocational counseling.

Every year, 650,000 high school students in 11,900 schools across the country are required—or strongly encouraged—to take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), a four-hour military test, during school hours. The students' personal contact >>



PHOTO BY LISA BREWSTER

Quote from climate scientist Wallace Broecker at the Climate Change in California exhibit, Academy of Sciences, San Francisco.

» information, race, ethnicity, gender, Social Security numbers, and aptitude scores are then routinely sent to military recruiters without parental knowledge.

ASVAB test results are the only student records that leave schools without parental consent. Of the students nationwide who took the ASVAB in 2008–2009, 92 percent had their results directly forwarded to recruiters. A bonanza of private information from test data is used by recruiters to form relationships with students in person and over the phone.

In April 2010, Maryland became the first state to prohibit the automatic release to military recruiters of student information gathered as a result of the administration of the ASVAB in the state's high schools.

Military regulations allow schools to determine how test results will be used by choosing

one of eight options. Option 1 releases student test information to military recruiters. If the school fails to specify a release option, the military automatically selects Option 1. Maryland's law mandates the universal selection of Option 8, prohibiting the use of test data for recruitment purposes.

Pat Elder serves on the Steering Committee of the National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth.

ALSO ...
The Army Experience Center in Philadelphia has closed. Visitors to the center, located in a shopping mall, could play military video games and engage in mock battles aboard a Humvee and two helicopters outfitted with battle simulators. The \$12 million equipment may be used at recruiting centers in other parts of the country.



6,000 U.S. veterans commit suicide every year, according to data from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Suicide rates are lower for veterans under 29 who receive VA health care services. The VA states that their toll-free suicide prevention hotline receives 10,000 calls per month, at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

CLIMATE

California Ballot on Global Warming Solutions

Businesses, environmental groups, and local governments in California are confronting big oil companies in a November election battle over the state's carbon cap-and-trade law.

The Global Warming Solutions Act, or AB32, was heralded as a

breakthrough when Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed it into law in 2006. The law requires a reduction of the state's greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. As a result, California has set limits on greenhouse gas emissions from oil refineries and other industries and passed regulations to promote more fuel-efficient cars. Supporters say the law is steering the state's energy markets toward renewable sources.

Proposition 23 would suspend AB32 until unemployment in the state drops to 5.5 percent for at least a year. California's unemployment rate is currently over 12 percent.

The California Jobs Initiative Committee, largely backed by Texas-based oil companies Tesoro and Valero Energy, has raised \$3.1 million to promote Proposition 23. Supporters of AB32 have mounted a fight-back campaign, raised more than \$2 million, and gathered endorsements from sources as varied as Google, AARP, and the Environmental Defense Fund.

So far, California voters aren't buying the oil companies' offensive. A July Field Poll showed that 48 percent of voters oppose Proposition 23, versus 36 percent who support it.

—Lynsi Burton

ALSO ...



Slower shipping is saving fuel and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent, according to Maersk, the world's largest shipping company. Shipping firms have been lowering speeds for large

**"IT'S A COMBINED VOICE SAYING WE WILL NOT TOLERATE BIGOTRY.
JUSTICE SOMETIMES HAS TO BE SERVED IN PUTTING ASIDE PROFITS."**

Serj Tankian, singer, explaining why he's joining Sound Strike, the musician's boycott of Arizona. Tankian joined Conor Oberst, Rage Against The Machine, Kanye West, Ben Harper, and a growing list of artists refusing to perform in the state until the state's anti-immigration law is repealed.

container vessels since the recession hit two years ago. Some companies have lowered speeds for long ocean voyages by half.

WATER

U.N. Vote on Water, Sanitation Rights

👍 On July 28, after years of grassroots pressure, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution supporting the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation. The vote was 122 in favor, none opposed, and 41 abstentions.

Nearly one billion people have no access to safe drinking water and 2.6 billion live without proper sanitation. Every 8 seconds a child dies from a preventable water-borne disease. Maude Barlow, former senior advisor on water to the president of the United Nations General Assembly, describes access to clean water as the "most violated human right."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, did not explicitly recognize the human right to water. As climate change aggravates water scarcity and contamination, advocates say that a specific resolution on water is essential.

The 41 abstaining countries included the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

Anil Naidoo of the Blue Planet Project said "We are heartened

by grassroots support for the resolution." Naidoo observed that the wealthier countries who withheld support tend to consume more water per capita than poorer ones, that they fear being forced to share their water resources, and assume providing sanitation is simply too difficult. He said that wealthier countries are also home to transnational, for-profit water companies that oppose regulation.

Daniel Moss is coordinator of Our Water Commons (ourwatercommons.org).



WORKERS' RIGHTS

Students Score Victory for Honduran Workers

👍 Student anti-sweatshop campaigners have scored a significant victory for workers' rights against the world's largest sportswear company.

A decade ago, United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) forced Nike to disclose its factory locations and recognize garment worker unions. USAS's recent campaign, "Just Pay It!", focused on \$2 million compensation for 1,800 garment workers for Nike subcontractors Hugger and Vision Tex in Honduras. When the factories closed in January 2009, workers were left

without legally mandated severance pay and pay due for hours worked.

Nike's initial response was that they were not responsible for the actions of Hugger and Vision Tex, although many universities' codes of conduct hold licensees like Nike responsible for the actions of their subcontractors.

The student campaign included mass comment on Nike's Twitter and Facebook pages, leafleting at Niketowns, national speaking tours, and demonstrations on U.S. college campuses. The first universities to respond were the University of Wisconsin, which canceled its Nike contract, and Cornell, which threatened to do so. Focus shifted to the University of Washington in Seattle (UW) as Nike's \$1 million contract to sell UW logo products came due for renewal.

The UW's Student Labor Action Project (SLAP) put steady

pressure on the university's administration to hold Nike accountable, and was joined in its lobbying efforts by a coalition including USAS, local labor groups and supportive elected officials.

Nike's change of heart followed the recommendation from the UW trademarks and licensing advisory committee that the university end its Nike contract if the dispute was not resolved.

The total compensation Nike has negotiated with the CGT union in Honduras includes \$1.5 million in severance pay, priority hiring by Nike's other Honduran suppliers, a commitment to expand its sourcing in Honduras as its overall business expands, priority hiring for the 1,800 affected workers, nine months of medical care through the country's social security system, and the provision of a paid job training program.

—Valerie Schloredt



PHOTO BY ANITA SARKEESIAN

Protesters in Phoenix, Ariz., scaled a downtown crane to display their message, "Stop hate, no 287g, no 1070," linking the local racial profiling law with the federal policy of criminalization.

People We Love



CHEF ANN COOPER *Fighting for Healthy School Lunches*

When Chef Ann Cooper pulled nachos off the Berkeley (Calif.) School District cafeteria menu, the students went on strike. “Deconstructed” nachos, made with real beans and baked chips, replaced Day-Glo cheese on fried chips.

The students eventually came around, thanks to Cooper’s “special marketing component,” a hands-on approach that allows kids to “experience food from the farming stages to the cooking, and the background behind the food.”

A former hotel and resort chef, Cooper has been an advocate for healthy school lunches for the past decade, and is now director of the Berkeley School District’s Nutrition Services. Cooper founded the nonprofit Food Family Farming Foundation (F3), which offers a Web portal called “The Lunch Box” with tools for schools pursuing cafeteria food reform. “Hungry or malnourished kids can’t learn,” Cooper said. “This is something that really should be a birthright.”



HUMBERTO RÍOS LABRADA *Helping Farmers*

Cuba lost more than its key trading partner when the Soviet Union fell in 1991. The island nation was also cut off from most of the oil and pesticide fueling its sugar industry, and its agricultural system collapsed.

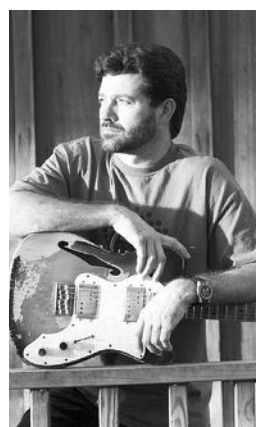
Humberto Ríos Labrada, then a graduate student, noticed individual farmers experimenting with seed diversity on their own plots of land. To help expand the movement and promote self-sufficiency, Ríos set off to build farming cooperatives.

Ríos has since worked with other young scientists to connect farmers with researchers, professors, and biodiversity experts. His team established learning centers and “seed fairs” around the island, now involving a network of 50,000 farmers.

Winner of a 2010 Goldman Environmental Prize, Ríos has watched seed fairs become celebrated events, where community members gather with farmers to exchange local products and socialize.



www.YesMagazine.org/rios-labrada
Robert Redford tells Humberto’s story



TAB BENOIT *Music to Heal the Gulf*

Even before Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, Cajun musician and Louisiana native Tab Benoit was writing music about coastal erosion, likening the state’s retreating coast to a modern-day Atlantis. The home where his grandparents once lived is today under water.

Between 1932 and 2000, Louisiana lost 1,900 square miles of land; during 2005 alone, 118 square miles were lost. Benoit blames the damage on the practices of oil companies. For nearly a century, the industry has installed rigs in swampland and dug canals through natural deltas, leaving land weakened by salt water and prone to flooding.

Benoit founded the non-profit Voice of the Wetlands in 2003, uniting artists, local leaders, and volunteers. In the wake of the BP oil disaster, Voice of the Wetlands recruited volunteers in relief efforts. Benoit helped to raise \$300,000 by performing in the May 2010 Gulf Aid Benefit concert.



www.YesMagazine.org/tab-benoit
An interview with Tab Benoit



NADIA JANJUA *Combining Islam and the Environment*

Nadia Janjua was working at a corporate architecture firm in Arlington, Va., when she became interested in green building and sustainability. So in 2007, she joined four other young Muslim professionals in founding DC Green Muslims, also called Green Muslims in the District.

The group organizes social and service events that inspire members to reflect on how they incorporate sustainability into their everyday lives. DC Green Muslims also participated in the No Impact Project.

The founders have since passed on DC Green Muslims to a new set of leaders, allowing Janjua to pursue painting, sketching, and photography. “Faith and spirituality are an indistinct part of everything I do, not only in creating art but in every part of my life,” she said.

Janjua recently exhibited her paintings at the sixth World Islamic Economic Forum in Malaysia, where she spoke about providing artistic opportunities for Muslim youth.

COMMENTARY :: Peter Barnes

CLEAR ACT: A CLIMATE BILL THAT CAN PASS

For nearly a decade, green NGOs in Washington worked closely with corporate polluters to promote “cap and trade” as a climate solution. The deal was, there’d be a leaky carbon cap with lots of money flowing to polluters and Wall Street. It was far from perfect, but better—so the NGOs said—than nothing.

During the Bush years this strategy made sense—no other approach could survive a presidential veto. After 2008, when Democrats came to power, it made less sense, but the NGOs stuck with it.

In 2009, they squeezed a cap-and-trade bill through the House with 50.3 percent of members voting for it. For the past year they’ve been pushing a similar bill in the Senate, where 60 percent is needed to end debate. With John Kerry and Joe Lieberman doing the deals, they tweaked and re-tweaked the cap-and-trade bill to please coal-burning and nuclear utilities, oil and gas companies, agribusiness and manufacturers, and more. The result was a giant mish-mash that confused everyone and didn’t pick up votes. Finally, in late July 2010, Harry Reid, the Democratic leader, threw in the towel. This “sum of all lobbies” strategy simply wasn’t working.

What now? With Republicans poised to gain seats in November, the future for climate legislation seems bleak. Any climate bill will have to overcome Republican objections that it is a “national energy tax,” and indeed, will require active Republican support if it is to have a chance of passing.

Fortunately, there’s a plan that can do this: the bipartisan CLEAR Act cosponsored by Senators Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) and Susan Collins (R-Maine). The CLEAR Act puts a rising economy-wide price on carbon, mainly by auctioning permits to bring carbon into the economy. It then returns three-quarters of the auction proceeds directly and equally to all legal U.S. residents, enough to assure that a majority of families in every state gets back more than they pay in higher prices.

The CLEAR Act, a.k.a. cap and dividend, has the potential to attract Republicans because it’s the opposite of a tax—it makes most Americans financially better off. Moreover, it’s entirely market-based: it raises carbon prices but keeps government out of the dicey and costly role of



It might have been better if you hadn't told the patient you needed to Google "appendectomy."

G. SMITH

Dr. Schulz was happy to operate on Adam's Apple.

ROB FALCONER



www.YesMagazine.org/cartoon for more reader captions

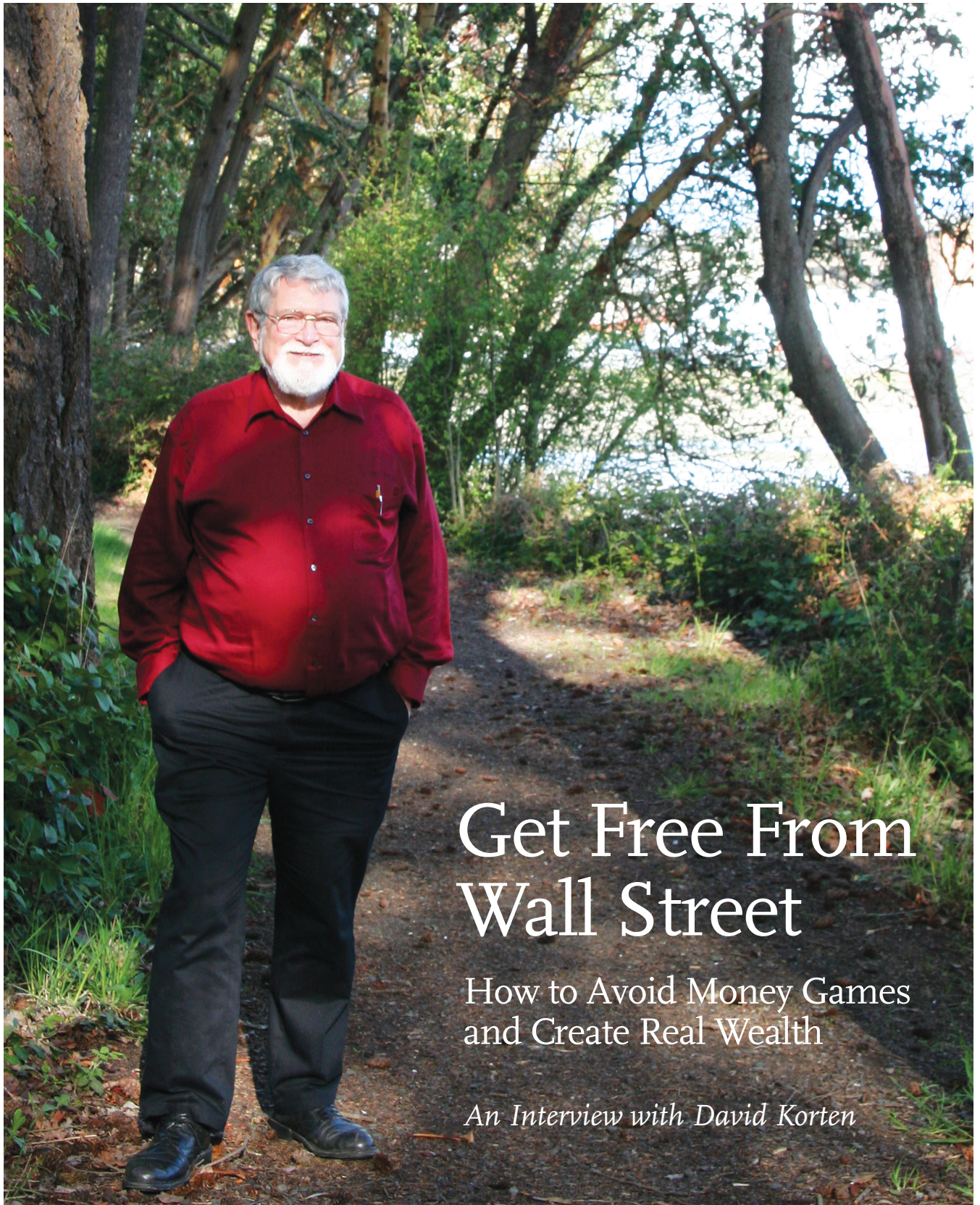
picking winners. Best of all, its cap-and-cash-back mechanism can be easily understood by skeptical American voters.

None of this means the CLEAR Act can pass without some political horse-trading. But the deals needed for passage can be based on publicly supported principles rather than private gain.

The main area for deals involves the 25 percent of auction revenue that isn't returned directly to the people. What if, for example, that money were allocated to two grand public purposes: grants to states for job creation, and federal debt reduction? The proportions could change over time, with more job creation early on and more debt reduction later. When coupled with direct cash back, such a simple, transparent carbon pricing system could attract fence-sitters on both sides of the aisle. **Y**



Peter Barnes has founded and led several successful companies, including co-founding Working Assets Money Fund. He is a senior fellow at the Tomales Bay Institute in Point Reyes Station, Calif., and author of several books, most recently *Climate Solutions: A Citizen's Guide* (Chelsea Green, 2008).



Get Free From Wall Street

How to Avoid Money Games and Create Real Wealth

An Interview with David Korten

PAUL DUNN FOR YES! MAGAZINE

Interviewed by Doug Pibel

David Korten's 1995 bestseller, *When Corporations Rule the World*, was a key document in building the anti-globalization movement. In the aftermath of the 2008 economic meltdown, he wrote *Agenda for a New Economy*, a critique of the overwhelming influence of Wall Street on economic policy, which has resulted in a political system that serves, not the many, but the very wealthy few. Eighteen months later, Korten is back with a much-expanded second edition of *Agenda* in which he details a strategy for taking back our political and economic systems and using them to create localized, community-controlled economies that foster the things we really need. I had a conversation with David at the YES! offices.

Doug: I'd like to talk with you about the new edition of *Agenda for a New Economy*, and your thoughts on the current state of the U.S. economy. The first edition came out just a bit more than a year ago. Why a second edition so soon?

David: Well, the first edition was written in immediate response to the crash. I was very taken by the fact that the crash opened up the potential for discussion of some really deep but neglected issues. To my dismay that wasn't happening. The

you're talking about—especially the ones that go more to public participation than top-down organization?

David: Well, in fact, most of the change has to be bottom-up. Because—going back to my larger frame in *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*—if you understand the organization of society in terms of dominator systems, the impetus for change rarely, if ever, comes from within the system. Even changes in the laws depend very

supporting local products, local farmers, supporting the various initiatives around rebuilding local food systems and local economies.

And the third is engaging politically to enact real policy changes that support the new economy over the old economy.

Doug: In the United States, it's an article of faith that we depend on Wall Street for economic well-being. You suggest that Wall Street is actually the cause of many of the problems on Main Street. How are people reacting to that challenge to such a widespread belief?

David: Well, it's a very interesting tension, because at one level, people have seen so clearly the corruption of Wall Street: the greed, the meanness, the predatory ethics and practices. So there is enormous outrage against Wall Street that cuts across the political spectrum.

THERE IS ENORMOUS OUTRAGE AGAINST WALL STREET THAT CUTS ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM.

political system jumped in immediately to try to fix Wall Street—to get it back to its normal function—which seemed to me the totally wrong agenda.

The book was written and published within the space of two months, which meant that I was building it around things that I had already had in place.

Doug: Quite an accomplishment. So what's different in the new edition?

David: The second edition goes so far beyond the first that many people ask me, "Well why do you call it a second edition rather than a new book?" It has 100 additional pages, a much stronger framework, and a much more comprehensive and systemic, holistic agenda. I'm very excited about how it came out.

Doug: What do you see as the principal routes in to the kind of systemic change

much on popular mobilization and demands on the political system.

One of the things that is much clearer in the new edition is the framework for a strategy of change, which, as I've come to see it more clearly, has three essential elements.

The first is changing the stories in the cultures. Much of the work here can be done on a very individual level, in terms of organizing conversations in your neighborhood or your church or your library, whatever groups you're connected to. Engaging people in conversation around the reality of the economy that we have, the ways in which we're trapped in fabricated cultural stories, and the possibilities of a new economy. That's part of changing the economic story that frames the policy debates.

The second element is creating the new reality. It is about shopping locally,

On the other hand, we have been lured into a situation where many of us depend for our retirement on Wall Street investments, which is really a euphemism for Wall Street speculation. Since our expectations of income cannot be met by Social Security alone, we look to these financial funds as the real basis of our retirement security. So that creates an enormous political constituency in favor of Wall Street. The tension is very real and very powerful.

Doug: What needs to happen to resolve the tension between outrage and dependency?

David: The interesting part of this and the key to understanding it is recognizing the distinction between real wealth and what I call "phantom wealth." Phantom wealth is money that is created from nothing, unrelated »

» to making anything of real value. The Wall Street game is about generating financial claims on the real wealth of society, while doing nothing to contribute to the pool of real wealth—food, shelter, entertainment, transportation, education, health care—on which those claims are made.

Doug: Why is this distinction hard for people to make?

David: Our whole language about money is so convoluted that it's almost like the language was designed to prevent us from seeing the reality. When a person uses terms like "assets,"

and economic policy makers seem to have had any recognition of the distinction. An increase in real housing value would, for instance, provide more comfortable shelter. The simple inflation of housing prices changed nothing except increasing the financial claims of those who held title to those houses.

Doug: What about the stock market? That's widely accepted by Americans as an index of economic health.

David: Well, the fact that the total value of stock market assets can go up and down by trillions of dollars day by day

it's monopolizing seeds, water, air, whatever it is—that's the game, so that you can extract monopoly profits.

Capitalism is also the enemy of democracy because the goal is for the financial interests to dominate the political system and manipulate the rules in ways that benefit the very rich and are totally contrary to the interests of ordinary people. That ultimately strips ordinary people of meaningful participation in the political process.

Doug: According to standard American analysis, if you say that about capitalism it must make you a Marxist.

OUR WHOLE LANGUAGE ABOUT MONEY IS SO CONVOLUTED THAT IT'S ALMOST LIKE THE LANGUAGE WAS DESIGNED TO PREVENT US FROM SEEING THE REALITY.

"wealth," "capital," "resources," there is absolutely no way you can tell whether they're talking about money, which is simply accounting entries, or about real things that those accounting entries are claims against.

If you add up all the financial assets in the world, they exceed the market value of all the world's real wealth, which means those claims can never be fully actualized.

Over the long term, the system has to collapse, as it did. Since we are pumping it back up, it will inevitably keep collapsing until we fundamentally restructure it.

Doug: So the fact that there's more money doesn't mean that there's more stuff to buy with it. As an example, there's the housing bubble. Four to six trillion dollars of value went away when the bubble popped. But what does that actually mean in terms of housing?

David: It means absolutely nothing in terms of houses. That's part of understanding the difference between phantom wealth and real wealth. It was a financial bubble, and the most extraordinary thing is how few economists

is a pretty powerful indicator that it has no relationship to any underlying real value. It's purely a matter of speculation.

So we've really got two competing systems. One is a system of essentially pure money that is highly biased towards the wealthiest and most predatory members of society. The other is the real economy of Main Street where people are trying to figure out things to do with their resources to provide for their livelihoods and to create community wealth and maybe develop a little resilience against upcoming shocks.

Doug: What is your response to people who say that capitalism, freedom, and democracy are inseparable? That it's all part and parcel?

David: It's a total lie. In terms of human liberty, capitalism works really well for the liberty of the very, very rich. If your concern is the liberty of billionaires, it's quite an adequate system. But more broadly, it is the absolute enemy of the free market, because the whole dynamic of capitalism and the goal of the larger corporations is to establish monopoly control of whatever sector they're in. Whether

David: Part of the mental trap that we're in is this idea that our only choices is between the repression of rapacious capitalism and the repression of communism.

I grew up very conservative, even fairly right-wing. The reason I pursued a career in international development was my concern about a communist takeover of the world, and how that threatened our American way of life. I am most definitely not a Marxist.

Actually I see myself as being an advocate of democracy and *real* markets. In some ways, I see Adam Smith as my patron saint, if you really understand Adam Smith's framework. His *Wealth of Nations* was a tirade against corporate monopoly, and essentially against the dynamics that we now celebrate as capitalism.

It's pretty clear to me that Smith's market ideal was an economy comprised of locally rooted enterprises owned and operated by people who live in the community and function within a framework of community moral values.

Doug: In the book you make an analogy between economies and living cells, which need to have permeable

THE HOPE FOR CHANGE RESIDES IN THE PEOPLE WHO ARE ENGAGED IN REBUILDING THEIR LOCAL ECONOMIES.

boundaries but still need to maintain those boundaries. What are the implications of that model for nations? Particularly the United States, where the borders cross both ecological and cultural boundaries.

David: An important and complex question. I would agree that our current national boundaries are artificially drawn in ways that make no particular ecological or cultural sense. The more fundamental issue, however, is whether the primary boundaries within which we organize society and our economies will be defined by private corporations to secure their private assets or by the nation-state to secure the interests of everybody living within its geographical borders.

The primary unit really needs to be the bioregion—organizing economic life within each local biosystem to meet the needs of everyone in ways that maintain a sustainable balance with the biosystem's regenerative capacity. Governance at all system levels needs to be based on a concept of subsidiarity, which means that rather than making individual local decisions, higher system levels support local control and assure balance in relationships among more local bioregional systems.

Doug: The first edition of *Agenda for a New Economy* was a call to action: It's time to bring down Wall Street. What is the essence of the new economy that you're laying out in greater detail in the new edition?

David: The much clearer frame now is the need to organize our economic systems to mimic and integrate with the systems of the biosphere. This requires a shift in the defining value from money to life and a shift in the locus of power from global financial markets to local communities. The new edition goes much deeper into the values issues. One

of my favorite new phrases is "greed is not a virtue, sharing is not a sin."

I began delving into this really weird reality that the capitalist culture has taken what religion has characterized as the seven deadly sins, and has actually come to characterize those as virtues and to label the corresponding virtues as sins. I mean it's turning the whole moral framework on its head and convincing us that somehow the pursuit of the seven deadly sins is really good for society and helps us build wealth and happiness. It's the most incredible moral perversion and the fact that this is not widely recognized is sort of like "oh my goodness."

Doug: You mention in the new edition that people's reaction when you speak is not "I've never thought of that before; that's completely outside the realm of my experience." It's more like, "Now that you mention it, that's what I really thought. What I've been taught doesn't make any sense."

David: Exactly. It's a mark of the power of the cultural manipulation. Not many people have really thought systematically about the transformation of the seven deadly sins into seven virtues. But most people recognize it at a heart level.

Most psychologically healthy people recognize the truth, because I believe the true moral values are innate in our mature human nature. Yet the power of the perverse cultural manipulation in our society is so strong that it causes people to doubt that which they know in their heart to be true. And I see one of my most important roles in the world as saying "No, you're not crazy. In fact, there's good reason to believe that you're right and the culture is crazy, as are the people who intentionally propagate that culture."

Doug: What gives you hope that the system can change in time to really

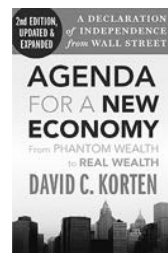
make a difference?

David: The hope for change resides in the people who are engaged in rebuilding their local economies. I'm also sensing an enormous openness to examination of these basic issues of how we organize the money system and how we rethink economic policy.

Doug: What do you want readers to take away from having read the book? On a personal level?

David: Most all of the dysfunctions that we're experiencing in society—economic instability, social breakdown, violence, and war, environmental destruction—they are all inevitable consequences of an economic system that is designed to concentrate power and focus social values on money. The only way we're going to be able to correct the failure is through economic transformation. The new edition of *Agenda for a New Economy* presents a model and framework that address these issues and that have a very real prospect of increasing the security, well-being, and happiness of almost everybody except perhaps a few of the greediest billionaires. 📖

Doug Pibel is managing editor of YES! Magazine.



The 2nd edition of *Agenda for a New Economy* lays out a blueprint for building the economy we—and the Earth—need. This book is the product of discussions with the New Economy Working Group, a collaboration between the Institute for Policy Studies, BALLE, the People Centered Development Forum, and YES! Magazine. For three ways to get this book, go to store.yesmagazine.org/agenda.

www.YesMagazine.org/korten-excerpt
An excerpt from the new *Agenda* book

Number of farmers markets in the United States in 1994: **1,755**

Number of farmers markets in the United States in 2010: **5,274**

Budget for federal Farmers Market Promotion Program grants in 2008: **\$1 million**

Budget for grants to be awarded through the program in 2011: **\$10 million**¹

Total jobs worldwide in the renewable energy sector in 2008: **2.3 million**²

Total number of Wal-Mart employees worldwide in the same year: **2.1 million**³

Total loss in U.S. stock value between July 2008 and March 2009: **\$7.4 trillion**⁴

Percentage of stocks held by the wealthiest 10 percent of Americans: **90.4**

Percentage of stocks held by other 90 percent of Americans: **9.6**⁵

Percentage of consumers who say the recession has improved their spending habits: **78**⁶

Gallons of gasoline saved by recycling 1 ton of mixed paper: **185**

Gallons of gasoline saved by recycling 1 ton of aluminum cans: **1,665**

Percentage of aluminum cans recycled in 2000: **54.6**

Percentage of aluminum cans recycled in 2008: **48.2**⁷

Number of U.S. citizens in prison: **2.3 million**

Number of Canadian citizens in prison: **39,132**

Number of citizens imprisoned by the Republic of San Marino: **2**⁸

Number of military hospitalizations for mental health issues in 2009: **17,538**

Number of military hospitalizations for injuries in the same year: **11,156**⁹

Number of electric vehicles being used in the United States as of 1995: **2,860**

Number of electric vehicles being used in the United States as of 2008: **56,901**

Number of electric car charging stations currently in the United States: **466**

Number of these stations that are located in California: **404**¹⁰

Percentage of Americans who report a positive reaction to the word "socialism": **29**

Percentage of 18- to 29-year-olds who report this reaction: **43**

Percentage of those over 65 who report this reaction: **14**¹¹

Complete citations at www.yesmagazine.org/ptc

1. U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2. Worldwatch Institute. 3. CNN Global 500, 2008. 4. The Pew Economic Policy Group, 2010. 5. Federal Reserve Board. 6. Ogilvy and Mather Chicago, 2010. 7. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 8. King's College London International Center for Prison Studies, 2010. 9. Gregg Zoroya, USA Today, May 14, 2010. 10. U.S. Department of Energy. 11. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2010.

A RESILIENT COMMUNITY

How do you navigate an unsteady economy, a future without cheap oil, and unimaginable changes in the climate? Here are ways to learn skills for self-reliance, build lasting communities, and take care of the important things in life, whether good times or hard times come our way.



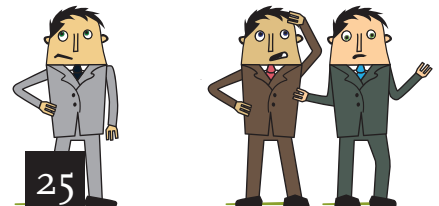
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Crash Course. In an uncertain world, who's got your back? Here's how to build a resilient community.



22

8 Resilient Ideas. A cob house, an ecovillage, bee hives, and other innovations and inspirations.



25

Test Yourself. Think you're ready for anything? Take the YES! Test.



26

Skill Up and Party, Too. Transition Towns make plans for an oil-poor future—and have a blast doing it.



Can You DIY?

Your grandparents could. Food, shelter, clothing—the self-reliant way.

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City Lots, Lots of Food. Richmond, Calif., lost its industry—now it's gaining a future, one garden at a time.



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Share Your Stuff. These days, whoever shares the most stuff wins.



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New Orleans Comes Back. Rebecca Solnit tours a city where people came together during their darkest hours.



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Stories Make Us Stronger. Lessons from people who've learned through experience—your ancestors.

CRASH COURSE IN RESILIENCE

WE CAN STRENGTHEN OUR COMMUNITIES AND OURSELVES TO

PREPARE FOR THE UNCERTAIN WORLD OF

FAILING ECONOMIES, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND OIL DEPLETION

Sarah van Gelder

*To cherish what remains of the Earth
and to foster its renewal is our only
legitimate hope of survival.*

—Wendell Berry

*When we are no longer able to change
a situation, we are challenged
to change ourselves.*

—Victor Frankl

Not long ago, a rocket took off from a Florida launching pad taking Americans to the moon. The moon shot signified to many that Americans could do anything we set our minds to.

Today, in another part of Florida, toxic oil is washing up on beaches. Hundreds of miles of Gulf Coast have been devastated, and people whose resilience was tested by Hurricane Katrina are being tested even more severely today. There are good reasons to believe many more of us will have our resilience tested in coming months and years.

Future historians may see this time as a turning point for Western civilization. In the popular zeitgeist, there is much discussion of end times. Millennialists await the Rapture. New Agers point to prophecies that 2012 will mark the end of the world (but perhaps the beginning of another one).

The End Of Cheap Oil

More secular folks also warn of big changes ahead. Concern about energy supplies is one reason. Author and energy analyst Michael Klare says we have already extracted the oil that's easy to get; from here on, we're into the "Age of Tough Oil," and the human, environmental, and financial cost of each additional barrel of oil will be higher than the last.

Fossil fuels contain millions of years of stored sunlight. A liter of oil, according to Transition Towns founder Rob Hopkins, is the energy equivalent

of five weeks of hard human labor. In a society that relies on fossil fuels for transportation, food, warmth, and light, the loss of an abundant and inexpensive form of high-quality energy is no small thing. There simply isn't anything else out there quite like it, and many geologists believe we are at, or close to, the peak production of this powerful source of energy.

The U.S. Military agrees:

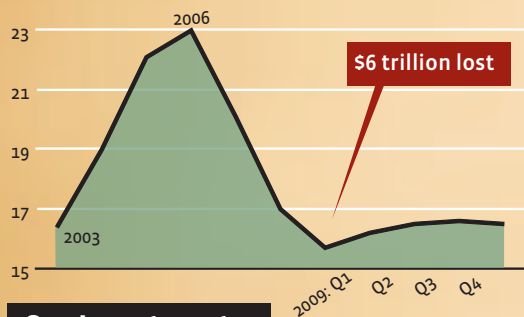
"Assuming the most optimistic scenario for improved petroleum production through enhanced recovery means, the development of non-conventional oils (such as oil shales or tar sands) and new discoveries, petroleum production will be hard pressed to meet the expected future demand," says the *Joint Operating Environment 2010*, published by the United States Joint Forces Command.

This is not to say that oil will suddenly become unavailable. It does mean getting the oil we depend on will »

Just the Facts

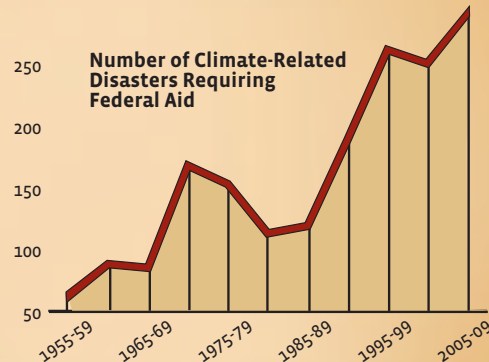
Research and Graphics by Kelly Shea

Value of U.S. Household Real Estate
(in trillions of dollars)



Our Investments

We used home equity as an ATM to make up for falling wages. The family home was the greatest part of our net worth. Then the real estate bubble popped, and the money dried up. (The stock market lost 50 percent, too.)



**WHY BUILD
RESILIENCE
NOW?
BECAUSE
HERE'S WHAT
WE CAN'T
RELY ON ...**

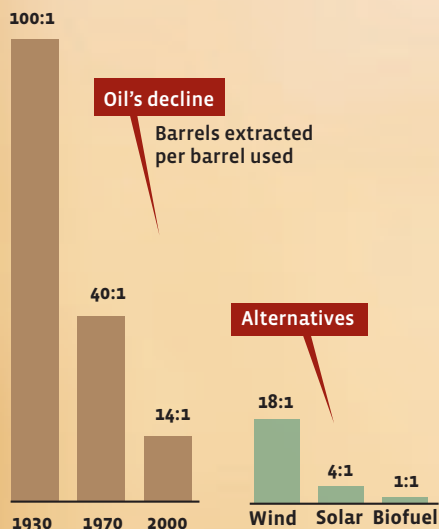
A Stable Climate

As climate change escalates, weather disasters become more frequent and intense. In the past 50 years, events requiring federal aid have increased almost sixfold.

Cheap Energy

We depend on cheap energy for almost everything. Nothing yields the high return for energy invested we got from the easy-to-reach oil fields we've already used up.

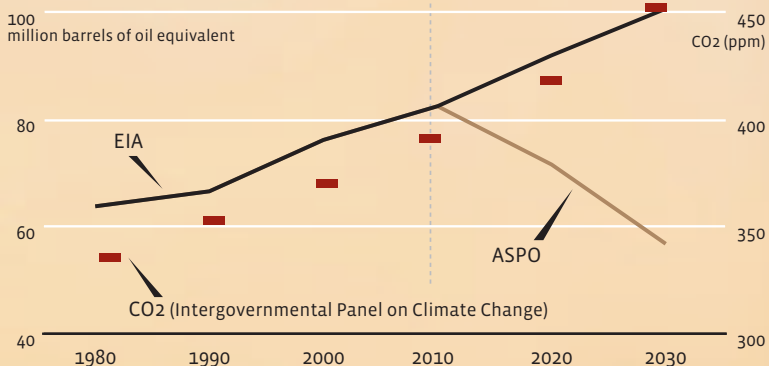
It Takes Energy to Get Energy



Oil

The Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas (ASPO) says peak oil is near—when production begins an Irreversible decline, spelling the end of our oil-crazy culture. Optimists, including the U.S. Energy Information Agency (EIA), predict rising production. But even if they're right, the additional CO₂ will accelerate climate change.

More Oil Or Less Oil, We Have to Change



» exact a higher and higher toll on people and the environment. Just look at the devastation caused by tar sands development in Canadian forests, the oil spills in the Gulf and now Michigan, and the impact on people as far flung as the Niger Delta and the Amazon.

It also means oil prices are likely to continue rising, especially if the economy starts to expand again, and

oil and other resources. The costs to wounded and traumatized members of the military and those who care for them, to civilians caught in the battles, to taxpayers, and to future generations have yet to be calculated.

We now have diminished resources to respond to the intertwined economic and energy crises. And our democratic institutions are so compromised by big-

Nor is this the bunker mentality of survivalists who look to save themselves regardless of what happens to others. Instead, these are creative, common-sense, low-tech approaches to meeting people's needs now while planting the seeds of a more sustainable world for everyone.

Food is the most popular example. Across the country, a local food move-

IN QUIET CONVERSATIONS, MANY ADMIT THAT THEY ARE LEARNING TO GROW FOOD AND WONDERING HOW THEIR CHILDREN WILL SURVIVE LIFE ON A VERY DIFFERENT PLANET.

with China and India's new energy purchasing power.

Even if we could get ever-increasing quantities of fossil fuels (by using even more coal, for example), we have the problem of climate change. World leaders meeting in Copenhagen failed to come to terms with the biggest threat humans have ever faced—the possibility that runaway climate change could make the Earth uninhabitable.

Scientists point out that the amount of carbon already in the atmosphere will cause further disruption before the climate stabilizes, and no one knows where it will stabilize—whether the new climate will be anything like the one we count on to water our crops, maintain stable coastlines, and provide adequate supplies of drinking water.

The Economy

On the economic side, corporations have come through the global financial crisis they instigated with bigger profits than ever. But the Main Street economy of real goods and services, with jobs for ordinary people, remains stalled. Decades of tax cuts to the wealthy and the outsourcing of manufacturing have hollowed out the real economy. Our infrastructure is breaking down after years of maintenance deferred by governments starved of tax dollars.

Our military is overextended, too, in its mission to ensure U.S. access to

money interests—and the media, think tanks, and politicians they control—that these foundational issues aren't even on the political agenda.

This set of crises may be severe enough to throw our way of life into chaos and decline. We don't know. In quiet conversations, many admit that they are learning to grow food and wondering how their children will survive life on a very different planet.

For some, of course, the chaos is already here. If you are a fisherman on the Louisiana Coast, a young job seeker in Detroit, a laid-off steelworker in the Ohio Valley, or a wounded Marine just back from Afghanistan, you may already be living in chaos. Some impoverished communities have been in crisis for decades.

The political Right frames the turmoil people are experiencing as a reason to hate immigrants, liberals, or people they say are “moving ahead of you to the front of the line.”

Building Community Resilience

But in communities everywhere, you'll find people who are working instead to bring people together. They are building their own resilience, and that of their families and communities, so they are better able to withstand the hardships that are already here and those that may be coming. These are not futile attempts to bring back a way of life that is on its way out.

ment has taken off. More and more people are planting backyard gardens, building greenhouses, raising chickens and bees, and starting farmers markets—not just because fresh and local is delicious and cool. These efforts are, in some places, a response to the lack of fresh and healthy food in urban and rural “food deserts.” Food self-reliance is one way people are seeking security and community in an uncertain world.

Those looking for a more direct response to the dual crises of climate change and peak oil are turning to the Transition Town movement. Started by Rob Hopkins, a permaculture activist in the United Kingdom, this movement has spread to hundreds of communities in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden, and more than 70 communities in the United States (where hundreds more are, in Transition parlance, “mulling” it over). People are joining who might not have signed up for an environmental or social justice project, but do want to build greater resilience to make it through tough times. Each Transition initiative is autonomous; each is engaged in studying what it means to move to a post-petroleum world; and most are creating spaces for skill-sharing, food production, and various experiments in resilience.

Other efforts do not explicitly link themselves to concerns about peak oil

and climate change. But the goals of community resilience and a sustainable future are often in the background as people start up bicycle repair co-ops, neighborhood energy projects, building materials re-use centers, DIY skill-sharing gatherings, swap meets, and eco-villages. Like Transition initiatives, these projects meet immediate needs, raise spirits, and increase people's chances of thriving during hard times.

Does working locally mean giving up on national policy change?

Community resilience projects can actually help build the political will to move society in more sustainable directions. They remind us that we can make history—starting where we live—and not just be subjected to the decisions of those in power.

As we learn to work together, learn

aid or do low-tech mechanics, raise farm animals or rig up a solar oven, you can meet some of your immediate needs and swap with neighbors.

Many people had these skills in our grandparents' generation. Consider drawing on elders to teach the practical skills they know, perhaps swapping for the skills young people know.

Also essential are the interpersonal skills that help people work together to get things done and to resolve conflicts.

2. Learn to live within local means.

Work toward replacing products and services brought in from long distances with things you can do, make, harvest, or repurpose locally. Consider introducing small-scale animal husbandry, nut and fruit trees, and food processing facilities. Develop local, clean sources of energy. Help restore natural systems

the guy you argue with about politics but who knows how to fix things. Or it could be the young woman who knows how to bring people together in a song, or the grandmother who remembers how things used to be made by hand.

3. Imagine, adapt, celebrate. Building your personal resilience will increase the chances that you can help loved ones and the broader community during difficult times.

Get physically fit and healthy, and minimize dependence on high-tech medicine and pharmaceuticals.

Get out of debt.

Hone your ability to observe and think for yourself—turn off the pundits, talk to your neighbors, and make up your own mind.

Build a tolerance for uncertainty. A spiritual practice or a calming practice

ENCOURAGE IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY. HAVE PARTIES. CREATE LIBERATED SPACES. CELEBRATE AT THE DROP OF A HAT.

what works, and learn that we have power, we are better able to insist on larger-scale change.

And we need that political clout to divert highway dollars to bicycle paths and efficient mass transit, and to put a halt to sprawl and build smart, walkable communities instead. We may even be able to bring back the American can-do spirit that made that moon shot possible. The new Apollo Alliance aims at making the transition from oil-addicted to clean and sustainable through massive investment in clean energy, green jobs, and energy efficiency.

Three Places to Start

Where do you start to build resilience? The YES! team identified three concepts that we believe can guide a no-regrets approach:

1. Build skills. Many transition initiatives start with learning and teaching skills that are valuable to yourself and others, and that can be practiced without harm to people or nature. If you can repair something, make something, or grow something, offer first

so they can be productive and resilient into the future. Use resources frugally and efficiently, and design things to last and to be reused or repurposed.

Include culture and entertainment, and provide opportunities for local artists and performers.

Set it up so people with little cash are included from the start. Develop means to barter, swap, and share. This will help restore your community's economy, keep the flow of wealth local, and include the unemployed and low-wage workers.

This is a good time to look around and notice who your neighbors are, and to begin building systems of mutual support. This collaboration doesn't need to be framed by dire warnings about the collapse of civilization. It can be as simple as sharing tools, planting a garden together, or holding a neighborhood potluck. If you start by reaching across class and race lines and across "culture war" divides, you will build a strong foundation for action. When things get difficult, the person who can offer the most may be

can help you remain centered in times of rapid change.

This may be a time of change, but it needn't be a time of despair. After all, the enormously expensive (and destructive) way of life we have been living did not bring much happiness or health. By putting life-giving values first, we could well find more rewarding ways of living.

You can begin building more joyous ways of life by making the resilience work itself come alive. Encourage imagination and creativity. Have parties. Create liberated spaces. Celebrate at the drop of a hat. Communities throughout the world share music, dance, and storytelling, in secular and sacred contexts. From Appalachian square dances to Mardi Gras parades, from Native American Sun Dance to holy communion, gatherings and celebrations are the glue that hold a community together.

No Regrets

We don't know what the future holds. Maybe in our lifetimes, nothing much >>



RESILIENT IDEAS

1

A Hand-Built Home



Above. Similar to adobe, cob construction allows for personal creativity. At right, Brian Liloia's girlfriend, April Morales.

Sven Eberlein

Before arriving at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, 25-year-old Brian Liloia had never built anything in his life. From a conventional perspective this might not have been the best resumé for constructing a home from scratch, but the community's penchant for inventive thinking and mutual support gave him the confidence to take the project on.

"I learned about cob building through helping other DR members construct their cob kitchen when I first moved here," remembers Liloia.

Dancing Rabbit (DR) calls itself an ecovillage because its members hope to create a small town with sustainability and environmental awareness central to everything that happens there. Community is the glue for the project, founded in 1997 on 280 acres in northeastern Missouri. But local, natural materials hold together most of DR's buildings: straw bale, clay, lime, and plaster.

One of the most common building materials at DR is cob, an adobe-like mixture of straw, clay, and sand. Liloia says it's ideal for a beginner: "Learning to build with cob is very simple, and the basics can be taught to just about anyone in a short period of time. It's intuitive and doesn't take a lot of technical know-how or fancy tools."

Over the course of a year, Liloia progressed





www.YesMagazine.org/cob-house

Photo essay: How Brian
built his house


The living reciprocal roof features skylight,
tree supports—and snacks.



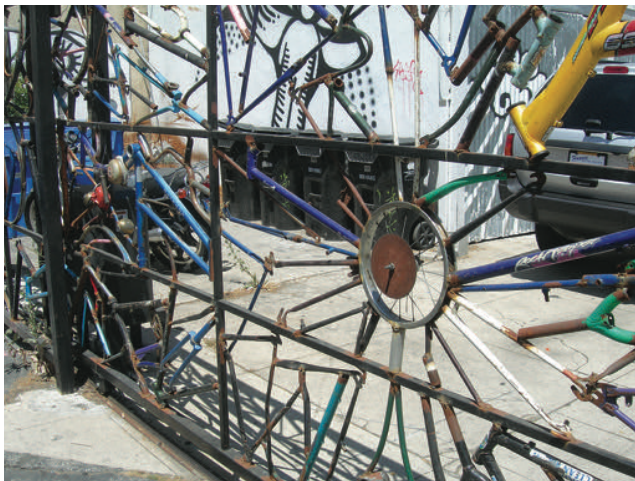
PHOTOS BY BRIAN LILOIA

from setting the urbanite (salvaged concrete) foundation to building and installing his firebrick stove. He and his work-exchange friends—people from outside DR, or new residents, who exchange labor for the chance to learn alternative building—spent many days and a few full-moon nights stomping on wet clay and sand, then combining it with straw to produce the material for sculpting the massive walls. Finally, last summer, Liloia moved into “Gobcobatron,” a name that arose during one of those wacky conversations you have while mushing mud with friends. “There’s nothing quite like living in a home that you built with your own hands,” he says. The house is also home to girlfriend April Morales, who arrived on the scene in time to do her share of the construction, and a pug named Pug.

It’s easy to imagine Liloia’s creation on the cover of a modern home-design magazine. The massive walls shut out noise and help keep the space at an even temperature year-round. While cob and earthen building techniques aren’t new—cob houses in Europe more than 500 years old are still in use—natural building is gaining momentum. People are interested in treading more lightly and relearning traditional skills, and you don’t need a mortgage to build a cob house. Liloia figures Gobcobatron, which measures a little under 200 square feet, set him back a whopping \$3,000 plus labor.

“Building your own home is definitely within reach if you have the time, energy, and inspiration.” Efforts like Liloia’s bring DR closer to being fully resilient and sustainable. He and other ecovillage residents are currently building a straw-bale and cob kitchen designed to serve six to eight community members. 

Sven Eberlein’s writing on ecocities was included in the Daily Kos “Greenroots” series. His website is tubercreations.com.



LONDON PERMACULTURE PHOTO



PHOTO BY LOIS ARKIN

RESILIENT IDEAS 2

Low-Impact Living in the City

Founded after the civil unrest of April 1992, L.A. Eco-Village shows how low-impact living can also be a model for urban neighborhood self-reliance.

The 40 members of this intentional community live in a diverse working-class neighborhood a block away from one of the most congested traffic corridors in Los Angeles. They're converting two apartment buildings to a limited-equity housing cooperative and community land trust.

Many residents have trained in building skills to repair and eco-retrofit their own units. The surrounding two blocks have been transformed with a park, vegetable gardens, orchards, and permeable sidewalks.

"The challenges for urban ecovillages are also our greatest advantages," says co-founder Lois Arkin, noting that working with public agencies and elected officials has enabled ecovillagers to influence public policy in the direction of more sustainable communities. Above, a gate made of old bicycle parts and, at right, drastic traffic-calming measures outside the residences.—*Sven Eberlein*

» will change. Although it's unlikely, maybe offshore drilling, tar-sands oil, energy efficiency, and coal mining will keep our fossil fuel-based economy chugging along, and climate change will be mild enough that we can adapt.

The "no regrets" actions in this issue are worth taking in any case. They are already helping rebuild abandoned communities, like Detroit, as well as those newly devastated by foreclosures and joblessness. They minimize our reliance on natural resources found under other people's soils and in other people's rainforests, thus reducing the need to maintain the world's most costly military empire. They contribute to an economic renewal based on systems that provide things people

actually need, instead of throwaways that we only want because of ads. And these initiatives will make us healthier, more connected to other people and to the Earth, and probably happier. There is nothing here you would regret doing. You can think of this as an insurance policy that pays you premiums.

If things do fall apart, taking these actions could mean that people in the future will find the seeds of a new future already planted, literally, in the form of diverse crop strains and livestock, bees, and fruit and nut trees. Local renewable energy sources may not be able to support an energy-extravagant lifestyle, but they may be enough to light the nights, warm us through winter, and keep people in

communication with one another and with the vast knowledge commons humanity has built over generations.

We may not have high-tech derivatives trading and landings on the moon. But people may develop greater wisdom along with skills for meeting family and community needs, for getting along, and for exchanging fairly, so that everyone's gift is welcomed, and everyone has enough.

With that as a foundation, the decline of the industrial/oil era need not mean catastrophe. Instead it could mean we work together to build a wiser era, rooted in place and founded in community. ♻️

Sarah van Gelder is co-founder and executive editor of YES! Magazine.



How Resilient Are You?

Take this test to find out.
Use this scale to score each statement:
1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree,
3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree

DO YOU HAVE A SUPPORT NETWORK?

1. I have friends and acquaintances in my local community (and I know their faces, not just their Facebook pages). _____
2. I am comfortable asking my neighbors if I can borrow stuff (e.g., tools, ingredients). _____
3. I could easily call on nearby friends and neighbors for help in an emergency. _____
4. I offer support to people in my community when they need help. _____
5. I'm active in community groups (like neighborhood associations, potlucks, churches, soup kitchens, gardening clubs, arts organizations, or local political groups). _____

ARE YOU SELF- AND COMMUNITY-SUFFICIENT?

6. I put my savings and investments in community and regional banks and local institutions. _____
7. I buy or barter the goods and services I need from local merchants, organizations, or individuals. _____
8. I make my income from my local economy. _____
9. I know how to fix, grow, build, or create things (such as repair a roof, grow kale, give a guitar lesson) that others would want in good times and hard times. _____
10. I have an alternative source of livelihood that could sustain me (and my family) if my current source were no longer viable. _____

11. I consume locally grown food that I could afford even if prices went up substantially (e.g., from a food co-op, backyard garden). _____
12. I know how to preserve food and keep a well-stocked pantry. _____
13. I have access to sources of water, even when the weather is unpredictable or the tap water doesn't work (such as a rainwater tank or a reliable well). _____
14. I have ways to get around, even if the gas at the pump is unavailable or pricey (such as feet, bike, electric car). _____
15. I have alternative heat and energy sources (such as solar panels or a wood stove) if the power goes out or utilities get expensive. _____
16. I actively promote the development of renewable energy in my local community. _____
17. I have a hopeful vision of what my community and life can look like in a future without fossil fuels. _____

DO YOU HAVE SOURCES OF PERSONAL RESILIENCE?

18. I sing, dance, paint, or otherwise participate in arts or creative work on a regular basis. _____
19. I regularly engage in activities that help me stay calm and balanced (such as meditation, exercise, prayer, or spending time in nature). _____
20. I take care of my health, such as through regular exercise, a healthy diet, and an appropriate amount of sleep. _____

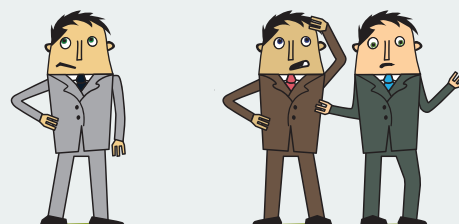
ADD YOUR SCORES

70 or higher = Leading the way to more resilient communities.

46–69 = Off to a good start.

45 or lower = You have many opportunities to become more resilient.

Want to improve your test score and learn more? yesmagazine.org/resilienceIQ



1

BUILD PRACTICAL SKILLS

Learn how to repair it, grow it, make it from scratch, and make do. Then you are better able to take care of yourself and you have something to trade even if you don't have money. Get good at communication, collaboration, and passing along what you know, and you're on your way to building a resilient community.

Party Down

TRANSITION TOWNS PLAN A GENTLE DESCENT FROM OIL
DEPENDENCE—AND HAVE A BLAST IN THE PROCESS



PHOTO BY MIKE GRENVILLE

No matches? Practicing fire-starting skills.



Transition conference in Newton Abbott, Devon, U.K.

Mason Inman

Ciaran Mundy, a successful high-tech entrepreneur with a Ph.D. in soil ecology, started a website to update people on all the “terrible news about climate change.” But after a while, he felt it wasn’t working—that it would never work. “It took me years to realize there’s no point in putting up more facts and figures,” he says. “They just bounce off people.”

Then he stumbled across the Transition Town movement, which was just picking up steam in his city—Bristol, England. When Mundy attended a training session on Transition Towns, he found a group of people addressing the big problems of our time, and doing it with optimism and a sense of celebration.

The Transition movement is built around making the transition to a world after peak oil—the time when world oil production reaches an all-time high,

then goes into irreversible decline. Oil prices will spike and the economy will stop growing, wreaking havoc in our society, which depends on petroleum for nearly everything, from growing food to maintaining economies. The Transition movement aims to prepare communities for peak oil—or climate change, or economic meltdown—by reclaiming lost skills, teaching new ones, and fostering local self-sufficiency.

The movement’s approach and attitude, as much as its goals, galvanized Mundy. “It’s not about being angsty, and doing worthy things. It’s about celebrating,” he says. “I like parties—I’m a bit of a party animal,” he adds with a grin. “So it’s perfect for me.”

Starting the Transition

Transition Towns started in 2005 as a community project led by Rob Hopkins, who was teaching permaculture in a rural Irish town called Kinsale.

The year before, he and his class watched a new movie, *The End of Suburbia*, that said peak oil will completely transform our lives. “It greatly focused the mind and came as a great shock to everyone—myself included,” Hopkins writes in *The Transition Handbook*, the movement’s bible. He added a project to his course to imagine how Kinsale “might successfully make the transition to a lower-energy future.”

Hopkins moved to Totnes, a town in southwestern England, and launched the first official Transition Town. He rallied people to devise an “energy descent plan”—which has become the core of the Transition movement—for scaling back energy use, sourcing food and other goods closer to home, and otherwise aiming for local sustainability.

Hopkins’ *Handbook* argues that these steps are essential to avoid undermining the planet’s ability to support humanity, regardless of when >>



PHOTO BY MIKE GRENVILLE



PHOTO BY ED MITCHELL

New uses for washing machine tubs.

“YOU CAN HAVE LOTS OF PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND HOW TO DO STUFF—GARDENING, HOME ENERGY SAVING, BICYCLE REPAIRS... BUT THE MAGIC LIES IN HELPING COMMUNITIES GET TOGETHER.”



PHOTO BY MASON INMAN

Throughout all the fun, Ciaran Mundy, co-founder of Transition Montpelier, emphasizes community-building skills. “I feel this is the primary part of reskilling,”

» the effects of peak oil kick in.

But these efforts could also strengthen communities and improve people’s daily lives. There’s no downside to eating fresher food, getting to know our neighbors, and avoiding maddening commutes. Those are all solid preparation for energy and food shortages, economic shocks, and climate tempests to come—and they may help us avoid such a bleak future.

Transition Bristol

Mundy’s party-loving enthusiasm seems infectious. Transition Montpelier, Mundy’s local group, has been in many ways the most successful in and around Bristol. Besides organizing street parties, they’re growing food in allotments—city-owned garden plots that people can sign up to use—and in planters they’re building along the streets. They’re assembling a buyer’s

group to build their own renewable power mini-grid, getting solar panels for the neighborhood at a discount, and then divvying up the electricity. And they’re devising their own local currency for Bristol, to support local businesses and strengthen the whole local economy by keeping money circulating in the community.

It’s no surprise that, in 2007, Bristol became the first large city to start the Transition process—it was the 11th official Transition group—it’s regarded as one of the country’s greenest places. A progressive city near the ocean, its hills are dotted with pastel Victorians. In its neighborhoods, the main streets feature organic food shops and cafes serving fair trade coffees. The city council’s sustainability office is in a revamped, energy-efficient, former tobacco warehouse, and out front they have a model home that’s hyper-efficient.

More than a dozen Transition groups have sprung up in Bristol’s neighborhoods and surrounding villages, like Portishead and Clevedon. “Our approach [for] how to take Bristol through the Transition process ... is to see the city as a network of villages,” says Transition Bristol’s official website. The approach seems to be taking off. Each neighborhood or village group has only a handful of core members, which makes meetings tractable and maintains a focus on a small part of the city that the members know well. A central group for Bristol, and another emerging for the wider area, are clearing-houses for experiences and coordinate efforts among smaller groups.

As of this writing, nearly 300 communities in more than a dozen countries have started their own Transition Town initiatives. The bulk are in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, but groups are also springing up in

Portugal, Italy, Japan, and Chile.

Many have come to Transition groups on a path similar to Mundy’s: They were worried about the environment and wanted to be sustainable, but they didn’t feel they were making much of a difference. Now, instead of worrying, they’re actually doing something.

That’s how it worked for Bill Roberts, a music teacher who’s turned his whole backyard into a garden. He started a Transition initiative in his village, Long Ashton, on the outskirts of Bristol. “I thought for years of joining my local Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth, but I never did,” Roberts says. Those organizations, he says, are “really top-down.”

But Transition is “bottom-up,” Roberts says. For him, that makes all the difference, putting “the importance and power of it at the community level.” When he first heard about Transition Towns, he “found it very inspiring—that to be green, we could actually have a better life.”

A local book publisher is letting the Long Ashton group use a piece of land to start a community vegetable garden. When they wanted to break the sod, a Conservative Party district councillor brought his draft horses and plowed the plot. It was tough work, even for the stout horses, but now Transition Long Ashton is planting crops and building a chicken coop.

Although these neighbors put in a lot of effort to create this garden, they enjoyed it, Roberts says. It’s the same feeling that reeled him in to the Transition movement in the first place. “It’s not that you give something,” he says. “It’s that you’re coming together and you get something.”

Reskilling

Besides growing food, they’re also gaining skills—often from their neighbors, who turn out to be resident

experts. Take Deryll Hibbitt of Long Ashton. She's always gardened—at 74, she's been growing food longer than many of her neighbors have been alive. Hibbitt was one of 23 people who showed up for the first Transition meeting in Long Ashton. Before the meeting, she'd never heard of Transition. But she soon joined up and started a "grow it" group—"a meeting place for people interested in growing food," she says, "where they share problems and knowledge in a very informal way."

Along with gardening, members of Transition Long Ashton are acquiring other skills that a few generations ago would have been part of common knowledge. It's all part of what the Transition movement calls "reskilling."

In Long Ashton, those pitching in with the community garden are also trying their hand at keeping chickens and pigs, and learning from their neighbors how to build fences to keep them in. They're learning how to preserve food as jams, by canning, and through lactic acid fermentation—the way that sauerkraut is made. "The networking through the Transition group has supported many of us in being adventurous with these things," Roberts says.

"Reskilling" can also mean learning new technologies. For Richard Hancock, an auditor for the health service, learning how to track his energy use has paid dividends. He joined Transition Hotwell and Cliftonwood, in his part of Bristol, and through them joined a Carbon Reduction Action Group—"like Weight Watchers for your carbon footprint," as he puts it. The numbers were surprising, he says. "When I looked at mine, my gas bill was the biggest part of my footprint—even when I was flying around."

Other members helped him pick out a new, far more efficient, gas boiler for his house, and figure out how best to install it. "Working out how to vent a new gas boiler would be difficult without expert advice," because of convoluted regulations, Hancock says.

To help people get tips and clues on how to improve their homes' energy efficiency, Transition Montpelier teamed up with the local authority and

the Energy Saving Trust to train several people to do "energy audits." In the autumn, they're launching another program, called Green Open Doors, to give people a chance, Mundy says, "to learn from a neighbor about domestic energy saving and generation" in typical homes.

The Peak Oil Frame

Transition Town members didn't invent most of the ideas they're using, like local currencies and, of course, gardening or making jam. But they have brought these strands of local sustainability together using the theme of peak oil.

"What's fantastic about Transition is the frame of peak oil," says Joy Carey, a Bristol-based food researcher, who worked for years for the Soil Association, the U.K.'s largest organic food certification group. "Peak oil focuses people's minds. Before, having a sustainable food system seemed like the right thing to do—but that was it. Suddenly there was a whole other reason to take it seriously."

Transition members have been crucial in helping Bristol and other cities imagine life after peak oil. Last year, when Bristol's city council commissioned a report on how the city might cope with peak oil, they tapped Simone Osborne—a member of Transition BS3, named after the group's postcode. "This was a major, major report," says Steve Marriott, city council sustainability manager. "It made senior people all across the city sit up. We've re-engaged a whole tier of decision makers that weren't on board before." The "most dramatic response," he says, is that the local branch of the National Health Service pledged to cut its greenhouse gas emissions. It is looking into the vulnerability of health care to peak oil and climate change, with efforts headed up by Dr. Angela Raffle, a public health consultant and member of Transition Bristol.

Tapping the Power of Community

Transition groups have had a lot to learn about the best role they can play in Bristol, says Claire Milne, who is a coordinator both for citywide and

national Transition efforts. "What's coming through really clearly is that its role is to act as a platform, to bring together all the amazing things that are already happening, and then allow them to work together more strategically." Or, as Mundy puts it, its major strength is in "joining up the dots."

Mundy may be a party animal, and Transition Montpelier's street parties may be a blast—but they also have a purpose. "Working together in community is something that we have focused on, whether through organizing street parties, film nights, growing groups, street art, home energy audits, or transport groups," Mundy says.

The real power of the movement is its focus on building community, Mundy says. "You can have lots of people who understand how to do stuff—gardening, home energy saving, bicycle repairs, and so on. But the magic lies in helping communities get together and work together in communicating, celebrating, and spreading those skills." In an age of mass media, individualism, and consumerism, he says, these community-building skills have withered—but we need them urgently now. "I feel this is the primary part of reskilling," Mundy says. "I can't stress this enough."

These efforts—planting gardens, putting energy descent plans into place, building community—may not be enough to avert the catastrophic change that many see coming. "Transition is a social experiment on a massive scale," says a banner on the Transition Network website. "We truly don't know if this will work." But, crucially, the movement's principles and attitudes have galvanized people, getting them out into their communities and their gardens. What started as a school project in Kinsale is now a worldwide experiment that's truly putting the idea of local resilience to the test. 

Mason Inman is a freelance journalist based in Pakistan. He focuses on climate and energy issues, and blogs about resilience at failinggracefully.com.

In U.S. Transition Towns, the Big Challenge Is Bringing People Together

Lynsi Burton

Michael Brownlee, co-founder of Transition Colorado, says U.S. Transition Towns are based on the original British model and attract the same kind of people. What's different about the United States—what Brownlee calls “ground zero for climate change”—is that there's more work to do here than

such as Australia and the United Kingdom, residents more readily accept the challenges presented by peak oil and climate change and are more eager to take action.

“There is just a markedly greater degree of denial here in the U.S. with things like fossil fuel depletion and climate change and economic decline,” Brownlee says.

That makes sense, Brownlee adds—after all, the United States has long been the world's largest consumer of energy and is more dependent on the fossil fuels that accelerate climate change.

Still, the 74 U.S.-based Transition initiatives—out of 321 worldwide—bring people of all backgrounds into their fold, says Tina Clarke, a Transition trainer who has helped start more than two dozen initiatives in the United States.

“We get conservatives who remember how it used to be when neighborhoods and community had a stronger sense of familiarity, community, and mutual support, and we get hippies who have always dreamed of a stronger sense of community,” Clarke said. “We get all kinds of people interested in local foods and local economic resilience for themselves and their families.”

For years, the environmental movement was considered a fringe effort in the United States, Clarke says. But when Transition initiatives emphasize the rising costs of oil and the need for community action, it resonates across the political spectrum.

“The model is a wonderful model for bringing people together because it starts with relationship-building,” Clarke says. “It starts with including

everyone in the conversation and inviting everyone to a huge party.”

Brownlee started the first U.S. Transition Town in 2008 in Boulder, Colo. When he initiated the first Transition training in September of that year, what he found was not lifetime activists, but novices to the movement.

“For many of them this is the first time in their lives that they have felt called to get involved at a significant level,” Brownlee says.

U.S. Transition Towns are still in their infancy, Brownlee says—they are mostly in the “awareness-raising” stage and have yet to devise comprehensive community plans. But what he does know is that the ideas of local food and reskilling are catching on and Transition Towns are making positive strides.

Transition Colorado's biggest success so far is its Great Reskilling program, in which 8,000 person-hours were dedicated to teaching others basic skills such as canning, home and clothing repair, and raising chickens—things that our grandparents or great-grandparents took for granted, but most of us today don't learn. The response has been so tremendous, Brownlee says, that other groups are teaching their own reskilling programs.

“So many other organizations and even schools are offering that kind of thing now that we don't have to do it,” he says. “It's going on everywhere.”

Businesses are catching on to serving local food, as well. Today, Boulder County has more than 80 restaurants that offer local food, compared to just seven in 2006.

“They're experiencing community at a level they've never experienced it before,” he says. “It is one of the most encouraging things that we see happening anywhere in the world.”

Lynsi Burton is a newspaper reporter in Bremerton, Wash.

www.YesMagazine.org/transition-albany
Pam Chang blogs about Transition Town Albany



TRANSITIONUS.ORG PHOTO

Ideas of local food and reskilling are catching on. Transition Colorado's Great Reskilling program passed on basic skills such as canning, home and clothing repair, and raising chickens.

anywhere else to achieve food independence, freedom from fossil fuels, and the network of relationships necessary in a Transition Town.

“There's much less a sense of community and connectivity here,” Brownlee says. “It makes it much more difficult for people to think in terms of self-organizing as a community around these issues.”

In other countries where the Transition Town movement is taking hold,

Bike Anytime, Anywhere, As You Are

Any pedestrian who's felt the backdraft from a herd of athletic cyclists at rush hour may feel that bike commuting is an extreme sport. But bicycles are ordinary transportation in many parts of the world, where people of all ages carry what they need strapped to a rack or hanging from the handlebars.

An emerging trend is the resourceful American cyclist, who adapts to whatever weather nature offers and plans around the lack of bike-friendly infrastructure. Community is emerging through "come as you are" cycling blogs, even when "as you are" is in a skirt and pumps, and on the way to the office. One example is letsgorideabike.com, with cycling advocates Trisha and Dottie encouraging bicycle transportation for those averse to lycra, competition, and racing handlebars. The movement is linked by an appreciation of going at your own pace and being in it for the long haul. Shown here, Chicagoan Dottie Brackett demonstrating snow tires during her winter commute along Lake Michigan. —*Valerie Schloredt*



PHOTO BY DOROTHY BRACKETT

Can You DIY?

What Your Grandparents Knew



DARN A SOCK

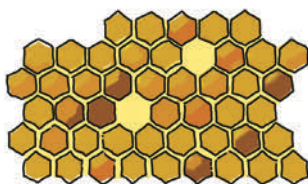
Put an old lightbulb or glass jar into the sock so that it shows through the hole. That keeps the material supported and gives a smooth surface for your needle work.

Thread a large needle with thread similar in weight to the thing you're mending: Embroidery floss works for cotton or synthetic socks.

Use a small running stitch to circle the hole, far enough outside the damage that the fabric won't unravel later. Don't use any knots; leave the ends unsecured.

Use long stitches to stitch horizontally across the length of the hole. You will eventually weave a framework of stitches to fill in the damaged area. Sometimes it's easier if you turn the sock upside down on every other stitch.

SWEETEN WITH HONEY

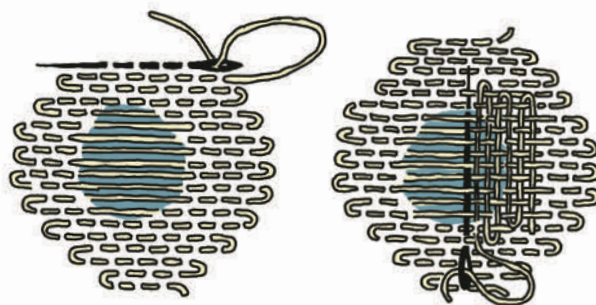


Before the global sugar industry, local honey was the universal sweetener. Because raw honey has antibacterial properties and tends to crystallize, it can store indefinitely.

Stock up on raw, local honey in the summer when it's been freshly collected. The freshest and purest honey will crystallize rapidly—and this is a good thing. It's what preserves the quality of the honey. The actual rate of granulation will depend on the floral source: Blackberry honey may granulate in two weeks, while fall wildflower honey takes about a month. Honey granulates quickest at 57°F, so aim for that.

When you need some honey, scoop crystals into an open jar. Set the jar into a pot of hot water for a minute or so and it will return to its clear and liquid state. Then you're ready to use it.

For baking, substitute 1/2 cup to 2/3 cup of honey per cup of white sugar. Reduce the amount of other liquids by 1/4 cup to 1/2 cup for every cup of honey used. Lower the oven temperature about 25°F because honey browns faster than sugar. Add 1/4 teaspoon of baking soda for each cup of honey in your recipe, because honey is naturally acidic and baking soda will temper it.



Once your horizontal stitches are done, turn your sock sideways and start weaving your thread vertically, in and out of the horizontal stitches. Secure the vertical weave at the end of the row with a couple of small running stitches. Turn your sock the opposite way and weave again. Keep going until your hole is filled in.



SAVE KALE SEEDS

Kale is a winter green and offers more nutrients per serving than any other vegetable. In mild climates it can be a four-season crop. Once temperatures rise, older kale plants will start going to seed. Kale plants create hundreds of tiny flowers on stalks that emerge where the leaves attach to the stem. In a couple of weeks, the flower petals fall off and seed pods form on the stalks. Let the pods ripen and dry on the plant—they'll get brown and brittle—then harvest the largest pods. Remove the seeds from their pods—there will be hundreds—save them in a paper bag, and plant them in early spring.

CAPTURE WILD YEAST

You don't need a package of yeast from the store to make a loaf of bread.

Mix 1/2 cup filtered or spring water (no chlorine!) with 1/2 cup of rye flour and 1/2 cup of white bread flour (using malted barley flour can also be helpful) in a glass bowl. Cover the bowl with a wet towel to let air in but keep bugs out. A warm day is optimal. Let the culture sit for 36 hours. After that, feed your culture every 12 hours by removing half of the old culture and replacing with a mixture of white and rye flour and an equal amount of 85°F water. Mark the level of the culture so you'll know how much rising has happened.

The culture should get more vigorous with each feeding. When the culture is bubbly and doubles itself in 12 hours, around Day 4, you can start feeding with only white flour and water.

After about five to seven days, a successful culture can double itself in eight hours or less, smells pleasantly sour, and is full of bubbles. That's when a "culture" becomes a "starter," and it's ready to bake with. Store as you would any commercial sourdough starter.

If your culture is slow to get going, some people suggest adding 1/4 teaspoon of unfiltered apple cider vinegar to raise the acidity, which encourages the yeast.

REFRIGERATE WITHOUT ELECTRICITY



The pot-in-pot cooler uses the evaporative power of water to draw heat energy away from the contents. In Nigeria, where 90 percent of villages have no electricity, these pots preserve tomatoes for 21 days instead of two or three days.

In a well ventilated dry area, place a small clay pot inside a larger clay pot. Fill the space in between them with wet sand and keep it moist. Cover the top with a cloth. Store produce in the inner pot.

As the water evaporates, it pulls heat out with it, making the inside pot cold.



YES! MAGAZINE GRAPHICS, 2010

2 LIVE WITHIN LOCAL MEANS

Resilient communities rely when possible on local resources. That means growing food locally, and protecting and restoring the soil, water, and air that sustain us. It means converting waste into resources, fostering biodiversity, and getting good at exchanging and sharing.



From Vacant City Lots to Food On the Table

How to Grow Food Where We Need It

Madeline Ostrander

The first time I went to Richmond, Calif., nine years ago, my friend, who ran a punk music recording studio out of a converted warehouse, told us not to park our car on the street. The day before, vandals had walked the block and smashed several car windows.

At least a few things have started to change in Richmond since then: A berry garden sits beside a bike trail in the Iron Triangle, a neighborhood at the center of the city bordered on three sides by old rail lines. Once a month, Latino and African American families, often people who live just a few blocks from each other but rarely had a chance to meet in the past, gather at the garden and have a barbecue. Tomatoes, chard, and corn grow in raised beds across the street. Muslim families from the local mosque just a few blocks away pluck

fresh mint from the garden for making traditional Arabic tea. The garden is the work of Urban Tilth, one of the dozen or so groups at the center of Richmond's urban garden movement. It was built by community members, often young people, and is tended in part by students and teachers from the elementary school next door. And it has become a community gathering space.

Richmond boomed in the mid-20th century and now is like hundreds of other places around the country where industry walked away. The city is isolated from much of the cultural and economic life of the rest of the East Bay region. Young people can't find jobs, and they move away, or their restlessness is channeled into all the wrong activities—vandalism, gangs, crime.

People rarely get a say in what happens to land when their city falls apart.

But in the last five years, some Richmonders have taken matters into their own hands. Often with official permission but sometimes without, they have planted more than two dozen gardens in public lots and school grounds all over the roughest parts of town. Urban Tilth calls them "farms," and last year grew 6,000 pounds of food, which went to dozens of local families.

Many Richmonders have gardening traditions that go back several generations, brought by families from the rural South who came for shipbuilding jobs >>

Through the organization Urban Tilth, youth and volunteers grow food on public land. Right, Urban Tilth's Doria Robinson and Jessie Alberto at the Richmond High School gardens.

LANE HARTWELL FOR YES! MAGAZINE



PEOPLE RARELY GET A SAY IN WHAT HAPPENS TO LAND WHEN THEIR CITY FALLS APART. BUT IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS, SOME RICHMONDERS HAVE TAKEN MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS.



LANE HARTWELL FOR YES! MAGAZINE

Urban Tilth staff Adam Boisvert and Quentin Dean and a group of high-school apprentices paint the borders of raised beds at the Lincoln School garden along the Greenway bicycle trail in Richmond, Calif. At right, Urban Tilth uses donated, scavenged, and recycled containers and mulch to grow food for Richmond families.

» during World War II and by more recent immigrants from agricultural regions of Central and South America. But many of Richmond's young people haven't been exposed to these traditions.

Now Richmond's urban gardening movement is yielding a small but radical cultural change. Urban agriculture has become a regular part of the curriculum in two local high schools. Areas in and near the gardens that seemed off-limits or unsafe in years past are becoming gathering places where Richmonders throw picnics, play outside, pick berries, and ride bicycles.

And dozens of young Richmonders have been given the chance to grow something in a community they thought had little future.

The Comeback Kids

The train to Richmond leaves Berkeley and passes miles of strip malls, junkyards, and abandoned warehouses before reaching the Iron Triangle. Doria Robinson, Urban Tilth's executive director, meets me at the station, wearing sweat pants with a racing stripe and talking nonstop.

The granddaughter of an avid rose gardener and a local minister, she was one of the kids who left Richmond as soon as she could.

"I wanted to get out, like most people. I was like, oh, my God, what a lost cause. Nobody ever said anything positive about Richmond," she says.

She went to college on the East Coast and lived in San Francisco for

several years. She moved back five years ago to take care of her great aunt's house and started working with Urban Tilth. Now, at 36, she's focused on bringing young people back into the fabric of the community.

Robinson and her colleague, Adam Boisvert, drive me through the city in a pickup truck, first to the berry garden and then to Richmond High School, one of Urban Tilth's two school-based farms.

We have to clear a pair of security guards and pass through a temporary metal fence before walking into Richmond High's paved schoolyard. The school is still reeling since one of its students was gang-raped by a group of teenage boys after a homecoming

dance last fall.

Behind the rust-colored trailers that serve as extra classrooms stand 12 vegetable beds and a shed that has been remade into a greenhouse. Beyond them and behind a football field are six long raised rows, nearly 800 square feet of cultivation space. They were built on a Sunday in February by 67 Richmond High students, teachers, administrators, and volunteers from local neighborhoods.

A class of 30 students has planted chard, tomatoes, carrots, peppers, and beans, with help from Urban Tilth staff and a teacher paid by the district. The content of their "Urban Ecology and Food Systems" class is a little subversive. It's about fairness, nutrition, food deserts, oil, and why some people get left out of the economy.

Robinson enjoys a certain act-now-apologize-later approach to getting hold of land. At Richmond High, the project started when students wanted to fix up an old garden that had been neglected for a decade. At other schools, Urban Tilth has gotten keys from staff and teachers and persuaded groundskeepers to switch on the water, then asked the administration for permission. Only in the last six months has the school district itself negotiated a formal land-use agreement with the organization.

I asked a facilities engineer in the school district administration how Urban Tilth started its four school gardens. "They just did it. Nice, huh?" he said, a bit sardonically.

Young energy drives Urban Tilth—20-something activists, recent grads looking for work, students—and not just A-students. Tania Pulido, age 21, joined Urban Tilth last October after years as a self-described "troubled youth."

"I used to cut school a lot, and I barely graduated," she says. She now studies new media and film, is a political activist, and leads gardening projects on the bicycle trail and at the schools.

Seven of Urban Tilth's 11 staff are

under 30, and several began as high-school apprentices. Jessie Alberto was among the Richmond High students who brought the school's garden back to life. Now 20 years old, he trains students to garden at Richmond and Kennedy High Schools. He doesn't like the words "behavior problem."

"I want to say we have kids who are really high in energy," he says. He puts these kids in charge of their peers on labor-intensive projects—weeding, pruning, and digging. "The thinking and the vigorous work calms them down," he says.

Rights to the Garden

There is a basic question that comes up when you sow seeds on land you don't own. When parking strips and vacant lots fill with flowers and fruit trees, property values spike, then rents and taxes.

Daryl Hannah and Julia Butterfly Hill brought national attention to South Central Farm, the famous urban garden in Los Angeles that was cultivated by 350 mostly Latino families. But their efforts couldn't stop the property's owner from bulldozing it to build a warehouse. What happens when land becomes more valuable as a condominium development or a mall than a public garden?

My last stop with Robinson and Boisvert is Adams Middle School, which closed last fall as part of the school district's budget cuts. The school is up a winding street in the hills to the east of downtown. Property values rise with elevation in Richmond, and this school is on expensive ground.

There is a level, circular plot behind a row of trees where Urban Tilth has planted tomatoes, an heirloom green called purple tree collards, nopal cactus, carrots, peas, and raspberries. Boisvert and Pulido have sketched out permaculture designs for this land, including a rain garden and a water catchment system.

The school district is using this property for storage. Boisvert and Robinson admit that the land is worth

millions. The school district has no plans to sell but concedes that Urban Tilth would likely lose the garden if the land attracted a buyer. Robinson is negotiating with a local land trust to see if they might be willing to purchase the garden and keep it in cultivation.

Meanwhile, the city has hired 26 high-school kids to work with Urban Tilth through a summer youth program. Robinson plans to use their energy to build a new orchard.

Four years ago, Richmond became one of the only major cities in the country to elect a Green Party mayor, Gayle McLaughlin. Under the mayor's progressive food policy, local gardening groups plant flowers and food plants in city parks through a program called "Adopt-a-Park." The city also gives them free logs to border raised beds, salvaged containers, wood chips, soil, and anything else that can be scavenged and repurposed for a garden. The city manager and mayor and local gardening groups are discussing a possible urban food ordinance: Gardening activists hope to make it easier to grow produce in Richmond front yards, gain access to water, and raise animals like bees, chickens, and goats.

I ask Robinson if she worries whether Urban Tilth's prospects would shift suddenly if the city administration changes hands.

"I don't," she says. "What's really important is the food we grow and the time we spend investing in people. We know people in Richmond are smart people. We have a huge reserve of brain energy here and historic connection to the land. And we just need to draw on that, respect it, and have faith in it."

There's more than food and land at stake here. If Urban Tilth can make gardening traditions into longstanding cultural institutions, and use a tomato plant or a raspberry vine to convince a teenager that Richmond is worth saving, their efforts will outlast anything that happens to the gardens themselves. ●

Madeline Ostrander is senior editor of YES! and grows potatoes in her backyard in Seattle.



MORGAN TYREE FOR YES! MAGAZINE

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Return of the Mercantile

When the last clothing shop in Powell, Wyo., closed its doors in 1999, townspeople started their own community-owned clothing store. Buying shares at \$500 each, 800 residents raised a starting fund of \$400,000. Powell's Mercantile, also known as the "Merc," restored a once-barren downtown with empty storefronts to a thriving shopping hub and saved residents a trip to neighboring towns or states to buy clothing.

"There are people in our town who don't shop Wal-Mart. They shop at the Merc. They want to help support the local hometown," says manager Joanne Anderson. The store has fared well through the recession so far, with daily sales in 2009 ranging from \$1,500 to \$5,000. And towns in Montana and Nevada have followed suit and started their own community-owned stores.—*Tiffany Ran*



MMFEC PHOTO

5

Processing Food Where the Food Is

Most farmers get pennies on each dollar that consumers spend on packaged food. While many growers speak wistfully of adding value to their product, it takes a huge investment in stainless steel machinery and certifications to make packaged apple juice from raw apples. The Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center (MMFEC) in Ronan, Montana, is a nonprofit food-processing center that helps farmers learn how to convert their produce to commercially viable higher-value packaged products, safely and legally. This not only gives them a bigger slice of the retail pie, but opens up new markets: Schools and hospitals are more likely to buy carrots if they're pre-sliced. As these farmers shore up their financial security, the surrounding communities benefit from increased food security. The equipment at places like the MMFEC enables the preservation of local food for year-round consumption, while making agriculture more viable for smaller, independent, and new farmers.—*Ari LeVaux*





PHOTO BY BEN DUCHAC

6

Beekeeping on City Rooftops

Beekeeping is still illegal in 89 U.S. cities, but New York City beekeepers no longer have to use civil disobedience to provide shoppers with honey that's produced in the neighborhood.

Bees from urban hives allow city dwellers to generate their own food without land or dirt, and the bees aid local fruit production by pollinating trees. It's also possible that urban bee colonies, exposed to fewer pesticides than their country cousins, may be resilient genetic reservoirs that could help worldwide bee populations recover from parasites, or the little-understood colony collapse disorder.

This spring, food activists successfully overturned New York City's anti-beekeeping ordinance. A month later, Eagle Street Rooftop Farm, a rooftop CSA in Brooklyn, installed hives. Above, a beekeeper in Brooklyn's historic Cobble Hill neighborhood tends to his bees on the roof of his brownstone.—*Ari LeVaux.*

Share Your Stuff

FROM SOCKS TO CARS TO SKILLS,
HOW SHARING AND SWAPPING GIVES YOU MORE



PHOTOS BY SHIRA GOLDING

Share Tompkins helps residents share and trade goods and services in Ithaca and Tompkins County, New York.

Above, a recent Really Really Free Market.

Jeremy Adam Smith

Sharing stuff and services saves money, but the benefits go far beyond the financial.

When our goal is to own stuff, to amass square footage and cars and boats and electronic devices, our carbon footprint swells and we produce more junk. But when we share as much stuff as possible, we walk more lightly on the earth and often improve our quality of life.

Sharing also builds our ties with other people and strengthens our society and culture. This in turn adds to the resilience of our communities in the face of economic calamity, natural

disasters, and energy constraints. Historical and scientific evidence suggests that cooperation and sharing, not fortifying and hoarding, help people survive catastrophe.

The first step to creating a more shareable life is to do an inventory and look at the ways you're already sharing. Then ask yourself, how else can I share? Here are three ideas:

1. Share your ride.

It's easier than ever to share a car or bike—and thus reduce your carbon footprint.

There are now almost 200 citywide

bikesharing programs around the world. Most of them use GPS, internet, and mobile-phone technology to connect people with bikes. For example, each bicycle in Denver's new B-Cycle program can track mileage, calories burned, and amount of carbon offset—so each user is able to monitor their own fitness and see their contributions to the city's sustainability, according to the B-Cycle website (denver.bcycle.com).

Still need a car for some trips? Instead of buying one, you can join a carsharing service. Between 2007 and 2009, membership in North American

services like Zipcar and the nonprofit City Carshare rose by 117 percent—and is projected to hit 4.4 million within six years.

Own a set of wheels? You can still share them. We're seeing a proliferation of new peer-to-peer carsharing services like RelayRides, Spride Share, and WhipCar, which let you rent your car directly to strangers or share a single car among several friends. Let's say, for example, that you're visiting Cambridge, Mass., for a day and need a car for touring the city. You'd look at the RelayRides website, find the nearest participant who is renting out her car, check availability and reserve the time, and then go get your ride. There are also many new companies—such as Avego, Zebigo, and Carticipate—that connect carpoolers over the Internet.

The environmental benefits of car-sharing are enormous. Research by the consulting firm Frost & Sullivan estimates that, "on average, each shared vehicle replaced 15 personally owned vehicles in 2009 and carsharing members drove 31 percent less than when they owned a personal vehicle. These two factors translate into 482,170 fewer tons of CO₂ emissions and less travel congestion in urban areas."

2. Invest in the sock exchange.

My wife walked into a laundromat seeking change for a dollar, and there she discovered the "sock exchange," a board where customers pin single socks for anyone to take and match. Such gestures make city living more fun, and they suggest another way to live, where resources (like socks!) are conserved and shared.

There are lots of ways to share your old duds or get your hands on someone else's recycled fashions. In addition to conventional routes—buying from or donating to Goodwill—you can swap clothes online at sites like thredUP and Freecycle. At thredUP, for example, participants list what clothes they want to share on the company's site and exchange items through the mail.

Clothing-swap parties are easy to organize and are becoming popular

throughout the country—round up your old clothes, invite your friends over, and swap apparel. In New York, a group called Score! organizes megaclothing exchanges and parties across the city. They bring DJs, artists, and fashion photographers to take pictures of attendees in their "scored" outfits.

3. Know how to do something? Trade it.

Are you an expert on homebrews, bicycle repair, or mending clothes? Teach your skills to somebody else and learn something from them in the process.

Brooklyn Skillshare in New York organizes meet-ups where people share their personal expertise. "Everyone really has something to teach and something to learn," writes Meg Wachter on Shareable.net. "The seeds for the Brooklyn Skillshare began in the spring of 2009 when I attended a similar event in Boston and was inspired by the weekend-long workshops offered on a regular basis, free of charge."

Another Brooklyn-based project, the Fixers' Collective, brings neighbors together once a week to help each other fix broken goods that would ordinarily get thrown away.

And as long as you're sharing skills, why not also share stuff on a community-wide basis? Share Tompkins, a volunteer-run group based in Ithaca, N.Y., organizes monthly Community Swap Meets. "People give away and barter everything from homemade apple butter and original art to music lessons and massage," writes Shira Golding on Shareable.net. Beyond the tangible activities, writes Golding, "We feel we are contributing to the creation of a social fabric rich in giving and sharing."

It's such a simple, fun thing, and yet through neighborhood-level activities like skill shares and swap meets, I think we can glimpse another, even more shareable society. ♻️



Jeremy Adam Smith is the editor of Shareable.net, author of *The Daddy Shift*, and co-editor of two new science anthologies, *Are We Born Racist?* and *The Compassionate Instinct*.

RESILIENT IDEAS

7

Reclaim, Repair, Rebuild



The house-building boom has gone bust, but the rebuilding boom has just started. The ReBuilding Center, a non-profit in Portland, Ore., is a building supply store for sustainable construction. All the stock is entirely reclaimed and local.

Portland has one of the most comprehensive and accessible networks of reclaimed building materials and fittings in the country. Even so, demand at the ReBuilding Center is such that each day, 300 visitors browse through stock that is refreshed every 15 minutes. But salvaging these materials takes skill and labor; old buildings are dismantled by hand.

That's why the ReBuilding Center has a companion deconstruction service. "When you demolish something, you treat it as a liability," says executive director Shane Endicott. "When you deconstruct, you treat those resources as an asset." He notes that deconstruction creates six to eight jobs for every one demolition job, while benefiting the environment and saving homeowners 50 percent–90 percent over new materials. —Susan DeFreitas



www.YesMagazine.org/pop-up-swap
Score clothes at a Brooklyn pop-up swap

In New Orleans, Kindness Trumped Chaos



PHOTO BY N. KREBILL

New Orleans streets are once again full of celebration. Above, a jazz funeral street parade heads toward the Industrial Canal Levee in the Ninth Ward.

3 IMAGINE, ADAPT, CELEBRATE

Encourage imagination and creativity. Make space for joy. Have parties, create liberated spaces. Celebrate, especially in tough times. A strong sense of community grows out of shared music, dance, sense of place, and storytelling.



www.YesMagazine.org/banksy-nola

Photo essay: Graffiti artist Banksy left his mark on New Orleans

Rebecca Solnit

The taxi driver called me “girl-friend” and “sweetheart” with the familiar sweetness of New Orleanians, so I figured I could ask a few personal questions. He was from the Lower Ninth Ward, one of the neighborhoods inundated by Katrina—a mostly poor, mostly black edge of the city isolated and imperiled by two man-made canals—and it had taken him three and a half years to return to New Orleans. He still wasn’t in his neighborhood, but he was back in the city, and his family was back, and they were determined to come back all the way.

What happened in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is more remarkable than almost anyone has told. More

than a million volunteers came to New Orleans to gut houses, rebuild, and stand in solidarity with the people who endured not just a hurricane but a deluge of Bush Administration incompetence and institutionalized racism at all levels of government, which temporarily turned the drowned city into a prison. Supplies were not allowed in by a panicky government; people were not allowed out, and a wholly unnatural crisis ensued.

Even so, an astounding wave of solidarity and empathy arose. At Hurricanehousing.org more than 200,000 people volunteered to shelter evacuees, often in their own homes. And then there were those legions of volunteers, many of them white, working in a city that had been two-thirds black.

I have again and again met passionate young activists who intended to come for a week or a month and never left. In the Lower Ninth, my taxi driver's neighborhood, things looked better than even six months before. Brad Pitt's Make It Right Foundation now has dozens of solar-powered homes, built on stilts for the next inundation, scattered across the lowlands of the neighborhood. New businesses have opened on St. Claude Avenue, the main thoroughfare, and children play in the once-abandoned streets.

It's hard to say that there is a recipe for solidarity across race and class lines. During crises, the official reaction from government and media is often widespread fear—based on a belief that in the absence of institutional authority people revert to Hobbesian selfishness and violence, or just feckless conduct. Scholars Lee Clarke and Karon Chess call this fear of the public, particularly the poor and nonwhite public, “elite panic.” Because these “elites” shape reaction as well as opinion, their beliefs can be deadly.

But the truth is that most people are altruistic, resourceful, and constructive during crisis. A disaster is actually threatening to elites, not because the response is selfish but because it often unfolds like a revolution, in which the status quo has evaporated.

Civil society improvises its own systems of survival—community kitchens, clinics, neighborhood councils, and networks of volunteers and survivors—often decentralized and deeply empowering for the individuals involved. What gets called recovery can constitute the counter-revolution—the taking back of power.

Perhaps the biggest question for a disaster like Katrina is to what extent this transformed sense of self and society lasts and matters: Can it be a foundation for a stronger civil society, more solidarity, and grassroots power? It has been so in many ways in New Orleans, with groups like the Common Ground Clinic—a free health clinic that was started days after the hurricane and is still going strong five years later.

One important tool for future disasters, and social change in the absence of disaster, is simply knowledge of what really happened: how many people in the hours, days, weeks and months after Katrina behaved with courage, love, and creativity, and how much they constituted the majority response. Such human capacities can be an extraordinary resource not just in crisis but in realizing our dearest hopes for a stronger society and more meaningful lives.

Katrina is hardly a happy story. More than 1,600 people died. The racism on the part of the media, the authorities ready to believe any rumor, and the vigilantes who took it upon themselves to regard any black man as a looter and to administer the death penalty for these imagined minor property crimes were a reminder of how ugly this country can be and how much remains to be done. The city used the disaster as an excuse to shut down most of the public housing even though much of it was undamaged and intact housing was desperately needed.

Poverty continues, and so does racism; the South did not stop being the South or America America. And the BP spill menaces the region in a way that is even more ominous than Katrina. The hurricane was after all a kind of event that has come ashore for

tens of thousands of years, and when it was over people could rebuild. What can be done to ameliorate the spill is still a mystery, and the coastal edge of Louisiana, with its diverse fishing and foraging cultures and its abundance of wildlife, is poisoned.

New Orleans will never be quite the city it was. People there lost what many of us have not had for generations: deep roots in place, a strong sense of culture, and an intricate web of social ties to family and community, whether it's a church, Mardi Gras krewe, musical group, black social aid and pleasure club, or neighborhood group. Much was reclaimed; many returned, but some did not or cannot.

The taxi driver took us to the New Orleans Convention Center, where so many people, mostly African American, had been stranded in the days after Hurricane Katrina. But that day in July, it was hosting the Essence Festival, a black music festival at which tens of thousands of people in summer splendor circulated. Among the mix of booths were several from organizations founded during the weeks and months after the storm but still going strong.

Traveling through a vibrant New Orleans not quite five years after the city was pronounced dead means understanding what dedication, will, solidarity, and love can achieve. This year of disasters—the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, the volcano in Iceland, the spill in the Gulf, the floods and heat waves and droughts and rising waters—remind all of us that we are entering an era where disaster will be common and intense. Survival will be grounded in understanding our own capacity for power and resilience, creativity and solidarity.



Rebecca Solnit is the author of twelve books, including *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster* and *Hope in the Dark*, and is a regular contributor to TomDispatch.com.

www.YesMagazine.org/a-paradise
An excerpt from Rebecca Solnit's latest book

Robert Jensen

We live in the midst of multiple crises—economic and political, cultural and ecological—posing a significant threat to human existence at the level we have become accustomed to. There’s no way to be awake to the depth of these crises without emotional reactions, no way to be aware of the pain caused by these systemic failures without some dread and distress.

Those emotions come from recognizing that we humans with our big brains have disrupted the balance of the living world in disastrous ways that may be causing irreversible ecological destruction, and that drastically different ways of living are not only necessary but inevitable, with no guarantee of a smooth transition.

This talk, in polite company, leads to being labeled hysterical, Chicken Little, apocalyptic. No matter that you are calm, aren’t predicting the sky falling, and have made no reference to rapture. Pointing out that we live in unsustainable systems, that unsustainable systems can’t be sustained, and that no person or institution with power in the dominant culture is talking about this—well, that’s obviously crazy.

But to many of us, these insights simply seem honest. To be fully alive today is to live with anguish, not for one’s own condition in the world but for the condition of the world, for a world that is in collapse. What to do when such honesty is unwelcome?

In June 2010, I published a short essay online asking people who felt this anguish to report on their emotions and others’ reactions. In less than a month I received more than 300 messages, and while no single comment could sum up the responses, this comes close:

“I feel hopeless. I feel sad. I feel amused at the absurdity of it all. I feel



PHOTO BY KEVIN O'MARA

“In the Face of

depressed. I feel enraged. I feel guilty and I feel trapped. Basically the only reason why I’m still alive is because there are enough amazing people and things in my life to keep me going, to keep me fighting for what matters. I’m not even sure how to fight yet, but I know that I want to.”

I didn’t ask for biographical information, so there’s little data on the age, race, or occupation of the respondents. Nor did I ask specifically about political or community activism, but the letters reinforced a gut feeling that dealing openly with these emotions need not lead to paralysis and inaction. People can confront honestly a frightening question—“What if the unsustainable systems in which we live are beyond the point of no return?”—and stay politically and socially engaged.

One respondent, a longtime community organizer, put it succinctly:

“Recently several of our visionary thinkers have moved from the illusion that ‘we have 10 years to turn this around.’ They now say clearly that ‘we cannot stop this momentum.’ It takes courage and faith to speak so plainly. What can we do in the face of this truth? We can sit face to face and find the ways, often beyond words, to explore the reality that we are all refugees, swimming into a future that looks so different from the present. We can find pockets of community where we can whisper our deepest fears about the world. We can remain committed to describing the present with exceptional truth.”

What happens when we tell “exceptional truth”?

First, we often feel drained by it.

Another respondent observed:

“My personal ambition seems to decrease in proportion to the increase in world suffering. I think that’s part of my emotional reaction to crisis. I don’t think I am fully alive. I’m not depressed, just weirdly diminished.”

Second, we encounter those who don’t want to face tough truths. Many wrote about isolation from family and friends who deny there are reasons to be concerned:

“I’m a drug addict with over 20 years clean, and I know all about using up my future and farting out lame excuses. I promised myself an honest life to stay clean, and the double-edged sword is that I started seeing just how

How can we open an honest conversation about that future? It isn’t easy, but it starts with telling the truth, from our own experience, like this 70-year-old woman who lives in a rural intentional community:

“I’ve lived long enough now to be very aware of how different the world has become, how the cycles of nature are off kilter, how the seasons and the climate have shifted. My garden tells me that food doesn’t grow in quite the same patterns, and we either get weeks of rain or weeks of heat and drought. This is the second year in a row that our apple trees do not have apples on them. But most people get their food in grocery stores where the apples still

when the ‘collective’ is still in denial.”

The work of breaking out of denial is less about specific actions and more about the habits and virtues we must cultivate. Far from that rural community, a 35-year-old woman working in an office in Chicago summed up the task:

“We really need to take it back to the basics and keep it simple. This reminds me of one of my own quotes I thought of a few months ago—‘be humble or be humiliated.’ I think I’m a simple person. I try to avoid making things more complex than they have to be. I try to focus more on what I need versus what I want. ‘Be humble or be humiliated’ is my own personal reminder.”

This Truth”

REGARDLESS OF OTHERS’ REACTION TO TALKING HONESTLY ABOUT COLLAPSE, IT’S ESSENTIAL WE CONTINUE; NO POLITICAL PROJECT BASED ON DENYING REALITY CAN BE VIABLE FOR THE LONG TERM.

much our culture swims in denial.”

Sometimes people accuse those who press questions about systemic failure and collapse of being the problem:

“People get angry at me for it and call me ‘dark’ and ‘negative’ and ‘sinful,’ telling me to instead move to the ‘light,’ ‘positive,’ and ‘love.’ Whatever.”

Regardless of others’ reactions to talking honestly about collapse, it’s essential we continue; no political project based on denying reality can be viable for the long term. We need not have a crystal ball to recognize, as singer/songwriter John Gorka put it, that “the old future’s gone.” The future of endless bounty for all isn’t the future we face.

appear, and food still arrives, in season and out, from all over the world. This will soon end, and people won’t understand why. They don’t see the trouble in the land as I and my friends do. I grieve daily as I look on this altered world. My grandchildren are young adults who think their lives will continue as they have been. Who will tell them? They can’t hear me. They, and many others, will have to see the changes for themselves, as I have. I can’t imagine that anything else will convince them. My grief for the world, and for them, is compounded by this feeling of helplessness because there is no way we can have the collective action you speak of

Her personal reminder is relevant for us all, individually and collectively. Humanity’s last hope may be in embracing a deep humility, recognizing that our cleverness is outstripped by our ignorance. If we become truly humble, we can abandon attempts to dominate the living world and instead find our place in it. ●



Robert Jensen, a journalism professor at the University of Texas at Austin, is author of several books. His latest is *All My Bones Shake: Seeking a Progressive Path to the Prophetic Voice*. He is co-producer of the new documentary *Abe Osheroff: One Foot in the Grave, the Other Still Dancing*. Contact information and articles at uts.cc.utexas.edu/~rjensen.

The Experiences of Our Ancestors Offer

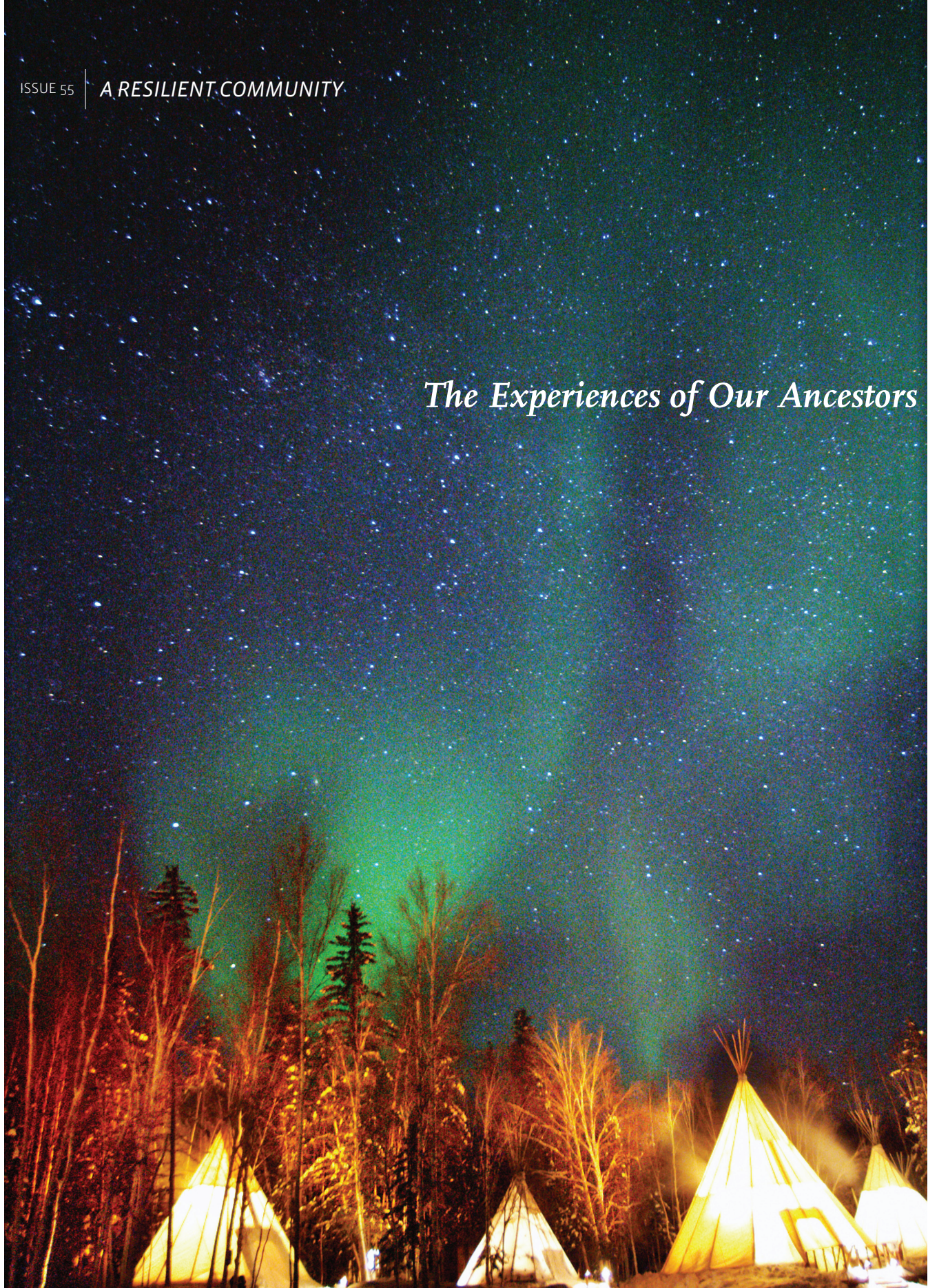


PHOTO BY HIDEYUKI KAMON

Northwest Territories, 2009

STORIES THAT LIGHT UP THE DARK

Us Wisdom for Surviving Today's Crises

Sanjay Khanna

Beginning in 2004, the Norwegian government and a group of international agricultural research organizations decided to invest in an idea they hoped would help humanity endure big future unknowns. It's called the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. Nicknamed the Doomsday Vault, it sits inside a mountain on an Arctic archipelago and contains the seeds of more than half a million of the world's crop varieties—in case civil strife, natural disasters, climate change, or other calamities destroy local and regional seed stocks.

The vault's contents represent a fraction of the results of one of humanity's greatest endeavors, thousands of years of agriculture, but key ingredients are missing—the values, knowledge, creativity, tenacity, and endurance that motivated people to maintain and propagate millions of plant varieties. It's that kind of wisdom that has, as importantly as the actual seeds, allowed cultures to endure and innovate over the course of millennia.

Much of that knowledge is disappearing, either because of the spread of consumer culture or because of the increasing loss of cultural and linguistic diversity. But a wealth of life-affirming knowledge and wisdom can still be found in stories—that is,

in the cultural and family stories we may have learned as children or that were shared across generations. These stories can provide lessons to help us weather the unknown with our kindness and benevolence intact.

Stories, I'd argue, can help us to become resilient people.

When I realized, through my work as a futurist, that the global economy and climate were on an unpredictable path, I began searching for stories, personal and cultural, that can encourage all of us to band together and work in service of the common good as the civilized world runs up against ecological limits.

Through this process, I had the good fortune to meet some remarkable people whose oral histories go back thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of years.

Adapting to the Changing Climate

Today, we're already witnessing major shifts in our climate, and greenhouse gases that industrial nations have pumped into the atmosphere guarantee that we'll see more change in our lifetimes, even if the world makes a transition away from fossil fuels. It's hard to imagine what such a massive upheaval of our weather patterns will look like.

But some cultures have stories about change that occurred long ago. According to George Edwardson, 63, president and elder of the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope in Alaska, elders in his community retain an oral history across a period of “seven ice ages” (up to 350,000 years), when the regional landscape underwent dramatic climate changes that, in turn, affected the human experience.

Iñupiat stories explain how communities got through this hardship and change. Victoria Hykes Steere, an Iñupiaq human rights advocate, recounts:

Our world was green and then it snowed. It was warm and then it got cold. The few who didn't die worked together. Snow and ice taught us to be human and think beyond our individual selves. In our legends and our history, snow and ice made us better people and led us to use our minds.

Our stories tell us that we didn't become real human beings until we became communities, until the welfare of the whole became more important than the welfare of the individual.

We learned from the animals, such as the wolves, to see how they took care of each other.

»

» Hykes Steere's people are already suffering as warming temperatures break up the permafrost and literally melt the ground beneath their homes. The cost of relocating Alaska Native communities, according to Hykes Steere, has been estimated at between \$100 million and \$300 million per village.

Furthermore, spikes in the cost of electricity are forcing many Alaskan Natives to go without light or heat during winter evenings, so they can use the little money they have to procure enough food.

"We're being hit hard now with climate impacts," says Hykes Steere. "Now with the Bering Strait opening up because of melting Arctic ice, industrial shipping and fishing are additional threats to our food sources."

Though the situation is grave, Hykes Steere's family stories remind her how to find strength:

We do not control the environment, but we do control how we respond. ... My grandmother said that when you lose hope, you lose everything.

My grandfather used to tell me I could keep certain sunrise moments alive in my memory. My grandfather trained me to look for moments when I was seeing something that would some day help me to remember the goodness.

He taught me to keep them vivid—smell them, taste them, and see them—so that when things got really bad, I could go back there. I remember the first time I did that, there were a bunch of moments that meant nothing to anyone else where the world was filled with beauty.

When things get really bad, I go into those moments ... and I'm okay.

To help us carry on as economic and ecological conditions continue to deteriorate, more of us may need to draw on vivid memories of unspeakable beauty.

Reconstituting Democracy

The stories of the Iroquois Confederacy look especially relevant as we

confront the crises of governance that have led the United States to bail out banks, permit disastrously unsafe oil drilling in the Gulf, and allow corporations to spend unlimited amounts of money on election campaigns. Renewal of sound governance is essential to addressing converging ecological, economic, and political crises.

The Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, or Haudenosaunee, have centuries-old wisdom on peacemaking and ethical governance. And despite a contentious academic debate about the Haudenosaunee's degree of influence on the Constitution, the U.S. Congress in 1988 passed a resolution stating that the framers of the Constitution "most notably, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, are known to have greatly admired the concepts of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy."

The resolution goes further: "The confederation of the original Thirteen Colonies into one republic was influenced by the political system developed by the Iroquois Confederacy, as were many of the democratic principles which were incorporated into the Constitution itself."

As a faithkeeper, Chief Oren Lyons, 78, formally upholds the traditions, legends, and prophecies of the Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation in upstate New York—one of the Six Nations.

Lyons recounts an oral history of the Six Nations' historic spiritual guide, the Great Peacemaker, who instructed the Haudenosaunee to "work with nature and be thankful." Hundreds of years ago, perhaps even prior to the arrival of Columbus, the nations had been at war. But the Great Peacemaker "laid down the whole process of confederation," urging them to eliminate conflict among themselves and be unified.

"He said our duties as leaders [are] to ... protect your relatives, your nation," says Lyons. "Protect all life, in other words, [the] flower as well as the trees, as well as the people, as well as the animals. Everything, he said, we're going to put into your hands, the

welfare of all life, that's your duty."

The Haudenosaunee confederacy was based on three principles. Lyons explains:

The first point was peace and health. You can't have peace without health. The names are interchangeable to us. Our greeting is "thank you for being well, thank you for being who you are."

Number two was equity, equity for the people, because you can't have justice if you don't have equity. Equity is first, justice comes after. So, the Great Peacemaker said, equity for the people—be fair, work for their interests.

The third was the power of the good minds, unity, to be united. He said, 'This is going to be your strength.'

In Sweden last year, I heard Lyons speak to a group of young leaders. He said that today, amid "a lot of abuse of positions of authority" among politicians, real community leaders need to emerge. New leaders, he said, need to be courageous and capable enough to help people organize and remain strong as the environment and society change.

Reseed your Own Stories

Indigenous stories offer us enduring wisdom, but Hykes Steere, Lyons, Edwardson, and many other indigenous elders have insisted to me that each of us needs to draw on our own ancestral cultures for guidance. When people learn their own cultural and family stories, they gain a deep respect for their origins and for future generations. They can then "know who they are and be who they are," says Edwardson.

Over the past few years, I've distilled five tips for personal resilience from conversations I've had with indigenous people:

1. Seek guidance from people who have overcome suffering with dignity.
2. Learn from those who have maintained a sense of humor through difficult times.
3. Converse with grandparents and

great-grandparents about their stories of hardship and the lessons they've learned.

4. Reflect on what's necessary for you to develop more inner strength than you have. If this is hard to do, learn techniques, such as mindfulness, to help you listen to your heart.

5. Connect with your own culture by developing an understanding of, and sympathy for, the experiences and stories that your ancestors handed down in your family.

For example, my family's history stems from pre-partition north India. My late grandmother, Satya Khanna, who was born near Lyallpur, Punjab (renamed Faisalabad after the 1947 partition that divided India), knew a thing or two about gathering inner strength through difficulty.

Six years ago, she and Sudha Bua, my paternal aunt, survived a terrible accident. They took a summer evening walk together in Mill Valley, Calif., when a speeding motorcycle crossed over to the wrong side of the road and struck them.

The surgeons at Stanford Hospital in Palo Alto didn't think she'd make it. Once it was clear that she would survive, she endured several surgeries to mend her pelvis and internal organs.

She told me that during her hospital stay, hooked up to tubes and a morphine drip, she remembered prayers taught to her in her childhood. In a mechanical bed, her face distended, blue, and bruised almost beyond recognition, she'd been in a trance, using the prayers she'd learned to visualize her body mending. Growing up, she'd come to believe time and space were surmountable by thought. In and out of hospital, she appeared to use her spiritual skills to hasten her recovery.

In August 2008, at 91 years old, my grandmother participated in the first official Khanna family reunion, which my aunt organized and held at her and my uncle's Mill Valley home.

I was feeling depressed at that family reunion. When you spend most of your time writing and researching

on climate change scenarios and the downward direction of the economy, it's easy to be overwhelmed.

One afternoon, I sat down with my grandmother when almost everyone else was on an excursion.

She saw straight through my unhappiness. She peered into me, smiled calmly, and said two words: "Bring gladness."

In spite of the specter of rising seas, increased drought, human displacement, and inundated cities prognosticated by climate scientists, I needed to find ways to inspire gladness in myself and other people. It's that simple.

Now I hope the inner strength I witnessed in my grandmother remains

a seed within me. As times grow more difficult, I pray that her ability to heal mind and body is a quality I can develop and call on.

The changes wrought by peak oil, climate disruption, and economic instability will affect all of us. Yet, those who gather strength from stories of beauty, courage, love, kindness, generosity, and good will can, in a social environment of growing uneasiness, store and spread the seeds of human welfare. **Y**



Sanjay Khanna is a writer, journalist, futurist, and the director of Resilient People, which provides guidance on preparing for economic and climate shifts. His writing has appeared in *Nature*, *The Huffington Post*, and *Grist*.

RESILIENT IDEAS

8

Making Fruit Public



PHOTO BY ALEXANDRA CROSBY

"Fresh fruit is a human right!" proclaims a sign. The scene is Los Angeles City Hall, and the protesters in homemade spacesuits are members of Fallen Fruit, a collective that uses art and activism to promote the use of city land as gardens to feed city residents.

Fallen Fruit began by illustrating land-use issues with artistic, useable maps for gleaned public fruit growing on or over public spaces. They also organize events, like twilight fruit forages and their annual "fruit jams," where neighbors pool fruit resources to invent new jam recipes. The gatherings mix fun and community-building in equal measure.

This year, Fallen Fruit's star project is curating EATLACMA, an exhibit on food, art, culture, and politics at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. It features intriguing use of the permanent collection and 50 artists' gardens on the museum grounds that will, of course, be harvested this autumn. —Susan DeFreitas



www.YesMagazine.org/fallen-fruit

Fallen Fruit's artful investigation into food, culture, and politics



IMAGINE A NO-HOLDS-BARRED “SUMMIT” THAT COMES UP WITH IDEAS TO SOLVE BOTH OUR JOB AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS. WHAT MIGHT IT COME UP WITH?

10 Ways to Solve the Jobs Problem

As the midterm political season heats up, one word on every politician’s lips is “jobs.” And for good reason. People are hurting—they can’t pay their mortgages, send their kids to college, pay their dental bills. Young people are wondering if they have a place in the work world.

So the economic pundits cheer when car sales go up, housing starts rise, consumer confidence strengthens. But as the oily ooze in the Gulf tars yet another beach, we all sense something is terribly wrong. We can’t keep tearing up the planet to keep ourselves employed. There must be another way.

So—imagine a no-holds-barred “summit” that comes up with ideas to solve both our job and environmental problems. What might it come up with?

Here is my starter list. You can add your own ideas in the comments to this article on the YES! website.

1. More farms, less agribusiness.

Agribusiness substitutes chemicals and machinery for labor and employs remarkably few people. Small organic farms are far more productive per acre and bring the people back.

2. More repair, fewer products.

Instead of tossing those shoes, that toaster, that computer, let’s fix them—and employ repair people in the process.

3. More recycling, less mining. Ray Anderson of the Interface flooring company says we already have enough nylon to meet the world’s carpet needs forever. The same may be true for

aluminum, steel, copper, and other easily recyclable materials. We just need good systems for recovering them.

4. More renovations, less construction. Our nation has 129 million housing units. We build new ones and let old ones deteriorate. How about renovating what we have and in-filling our cities to use existing sidewalks, gas pipes, water mains, and roads?

5. More restoration, less destruction. Whether it’s forests, superfund sites, or oil-laced wetlands, it’s time to restore. Some restoration can even pay for itself, as in restoration forestry where folks make products from the fire-prone, small-diameter trees normally considered too small to market.

6. More bike paths, fewer highways. They both cost money, but one is good for our health and good for the planet. What’s not to like?

7. More local businesses, fewer megastores. Locally owned stores employ more people per goods sold and you can often talk to a decision-maker about your purchase.

8. More dishwashing, fewer throw-aways. What if we got rid of all the disposable containers in fast food restaurants? At my friend Ron Sher’s Crossroads Shopping Center near Seattle, the food court vendors share a common crockery supply. No trees needed. It works.

9. More education, less advertising.

Let’s face it. Advertising is about making us feel inadequate for something we don’t yet have. What if we stopped subsidizing advertising with tax breaks and focused on educating people to lead satisfying lives?

10. More clean energy, less fossil fuel. Here we do need new stuff—wind turbines, solar panels, insulation, passenger trains. Politicians are providing some—though not enough—funding for these sources of “green jobs.” It’s the other items on this list they’re not even talking about—but need to.

You may be thinking that my list isn’t realistic because these options cost more or depend on government funding. But that’s partly because governments subsidize oil, agribusiness, nuclear plants, ports, highways, advertising, and other unhealthy choices.

So the next time you hear a politician talk about jobs, try comparing the solutions offered to this list. By breaking out of the narrow range of options that keeps policy discussions stuck, we can create jobs that not only sustain families, but also build community and restore the living systems of our planet.

A stylized, handwritten signature of Fran Korten in dark ink.

Fran Korten, Publisher

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America's #1 organic and local food website, **LocalHarvest's** mission is to help small farms develop relationships with

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Facing Race

September 23-25, in Chicago, IL. The Applied Research Center's annual conference is a key gathering for organizations and individuals committed to advancing racial justice. arc.org/facingrace

Tapping into Solutions:

The Future of Water

September 27-29, in Milwaukee, WI. Join leaders from industry, government, NGOs, and academia to explore water's role in society and share solutions for improving water quality and availability. YES! Magazine is a cosponsor of this event. elpnet.org/events/water

10:10:10 Global Warming Party

October 10, in your hometown. The 350 team has organized a major international work party, with an emphasis on both "work" and "party." The goal of the day is not to solve the climate crisis one project at a time, but to send a pointed message to political leaders: If we can get to work, you can get to work too. 350.org/oct10

Food, Culture & Justice

October 16-19, in New Orleans, LA. In New Orleans, food creates a cultural connection uniting urban farmers, food banks, fishers, faith-based organizations, and others as they work toward social justice. Attendees of the Community Food Security Coalition's annual conference will experience firsthand the unique approach to food organizing taking place in this region. communityfoodconference.org

www.YesMagazine.org/events
 For more upcoming events

Can Mushrooms Rescue the Gulf?

Researcher Paul Stamets says mushrooms can eat oil spills and rid the world of toxics—and he's got proof.



James Trimarco

For more than a decade, mycologist and inventor Paul Stamets has known that mushrooms eat oil. There were still a few kinks to work out; bringing the technology to scale and winning the acceptance of government agencies were two of the most challenging. Yet the basic science was solid and had been replicated many times by other scientists.

Then Stamets heard about the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. While his first reaction was horror and regret, he also knew that he might be able to offer practical solutions, while at the same time giving his oil-eating mushrooms a chance to show their stuff.

He wasn't the only one who thought mushrooms might be part of the solution. In the days after the explosion in the Gulf, the EPA contacted him several times to request a proposal. They wanted to understand how mycoremediation—the reduction of toxic compounds into harmless ones by fungi—could work as a component of their cleanup strategy for the spill.

Stamets drafted a three-page proposal and sent it off. Then he ramped up the pace of his research and shifted his focus to finding oil-eating mushrooms that could tolerate the Gulf of Mexico's salt water and powerful sun.

Spokesman for a Kingdom

Stamets is a bit of a rogue scientist. He began his career in the forest as a logger, not as a scientist, and holds no degree higher than a bachelor's from the Evergreen State College. Yet he has published three of the most widely read books on the art of growing and using fungi, founded a unique biotechnology company that now employs 37 people, and appeared in films and on talk shows to praise the talents of the powerful and mysterious fungal kingdom.

In fact, polishing the public image of fungus may be more important for Stamets than any decision to bring

mushrooms to the Gulf spill. This is because he sees human partnership with fungi as essential to the broader project of creating a sustainable society. Like most other environmentalists, Stamets believes our society is hurting the earth and that the consequences of this damage will be severe. But he differs from the others in his conviction that fungi are the key to repairing that damage, healing the planet, and accepting decay as part of nature as well.

Part of the problem is that most people don't know much about fungi, so Stamets is constantly working to educate them. He talks a lot about the mycelium, the underground network of hairlike cells that constitute the main bodies of mushroom-forming fungi (the mushrooms themselves are merely the reproductive organs). The mycelium is a little-known but fascinating form of life that colonizes the soil and partners with trees and other plants growing nearby. It gathers information about water, nutrients, and pests, and then takes a surprising range of actions. It can move water and nutrients from many meters away to moisten a rotting log or nurture a growing tree. It can remove toxins from water or zap dangerous bacteria that threaten a partner plant. Most trees cannot reach maturity without its assistance.

And, of course, the mycelium eats. Stamets calls fungi the “interface organisms between life and death” because they specialize in breaking

indigestible substances down into smaller particles that other living things can use as nutrients. It is this ability to digest complex organic compounds that makes fungi so promising for cleaning up oil.

A Side of Diesel with those Wood Chips, Please

Stamets first tested the fungal appetite for oil in 1997, when he teamed up with researchers at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory to provide fungi for several lab-based experiments. The team selected mycelial strains and set them loose on diesel-contaminated soil. At the end of eight weeks, they found that the fungi had removed 97 percent of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs)—heavy chemicals within oil that other forms of remediation had consistently failed to break down.

The chance to study this process outside the lab came a year later, when the Washington State Department of Transportation partnered with Stamets and the Battelle Marine Science Laboratory to compare different cleanup methods at a maintenance yard contaminated with diesel fuel. Workers scooped piles of the toxic soil onto tarps, and each pile was inoculated, either with a form of oil-eating bacteria or with Stamets' mix of oyster-mushroom mycelia and wood chips. There were also several control patches of soil.

Again, the results were encouraging. The bacterial patches, Stamets says, remained “dead, dark, and stinky.” Same with the control group. Meanwhile, his own patches were teeming with huge oyster mushrooms feasting happily on the diesel compounds. “Analyses showed that more than 95 percent of many of the PAHs ... were destroyed,” Stamets wrote, “and the mushrooms were also free of any petroleum products.”

Because the contamination in the soil patches was very uneven, it was difficult to measure the precise concentration of contaminants both

»

Oyster mushrooms—*Pleurotus ostreatus*—can feast on oil. Paul Stamets is working on ways to use mushrooms to clean up the Gulf of Mexico.

PHOTO BY RON WOLF

How Mushrooms Eat Oil

- 1 Mushrooms will eat anything**
Fungi are the primary decomposers in most environments. They have developed many unique tools for breaking down hydrocarbons and other organic chemicals. Scientists have identified more than 120 enzymes in the tissues of mushroom-forming fungi.

- 2 It's the enzymes**
These enzymes can break down toxic chemicals, including the cancer-causing hydrocarbons found in oil.

- 3 It happens underground**
Hydrocarbons with lower molecular weights are easier for the mycelium—the underground part of the fungus—to digest than those with heavier ones. However, the mycelium gradually breaks heavier hydrocarbons into lighter-weight compounds less harmful to people and the environment. With repeated fungal treatments, even the nastiest oil toxins can be rendered nontoxic.

crude-oil hydrocarbons

enzymes

mycelium

» before and after remediation. However, researchers at the Department of Transportation eventually declared the fungi-cleansed soil pure enough to use for landscaping purposes along the highways of Washington. And in the years since, Stamets's findings have been replicated by many other researchers, and further study has shown that various types of fungi are able to partially or fully detoxify oil and pesticides. Geoffrey Gadd of the University of Dundee, Scotland, even found that fungi can break down depleted uranium from anti-tank shells by allowing it to bond with phosphates to form a more stable mineral.

Since the Deepwater Horizon spill in April 2010, Stamets has been testing his oyster mushrooms for tolerance to salt water and sun in preparation for a gig off the coast of Texas or Louisiana. So far, he's managed to isolate a strain that can tolerate the salinity of Puget Sound, which is only slightly less than that of the Gulf. And he's

found ways to float the mushrooms cheaply on hemp "mycobooms" filled with straw and mycelia from which the mushrooms can metabolize oil on the surface of the sea.

Stamets says this new research is "very cool and unlikely to have been discovered if it were not for this disaster." He believes it will be used in the near future and has applied for a provisional patent to prevent oil companies from stealing the research. But he says he would be happy to share it for free with affected communities in the Gulf of Mexico.

More Mushrooms, Less Waste

Eating oil turns out to be just one of many practical applications for fungi. Stamets has demonstrated that they offer cheap and sustainable solutions for encouraging the healthy growth of plants, controlling insect pests, filtering farm waste, and creating medicines to treat human diseases.

Several of Stamets' projects take

advantage of the symbiotic relationships that exist between fungi and plants. Certain fungi intertwine themselves with the roots of plants, taking nutrients from them while protecting the plants from attack. Fungi can also make a plant hundreds or even thousands of times more efficient at gathering water and minerals from the soil.

Stamets' company, Fungi Perfecti, manufactures an alternative to fertilizers called Mycogrow, which some organic farmers say provides them with huge and healthy crops without creating pollution.

Another product based on the same principle is the LifeBox, a package made from recycled cardboard that contains the seeds of common trees paired with the spores of specific fungi that partner with them in old-growth forests. You use the box for shipping; the recipient tears it up and buries it in the ground. A cobweb-like growth of white mycelia will appear on the surface a few days later. This fungal



4

Add some compost

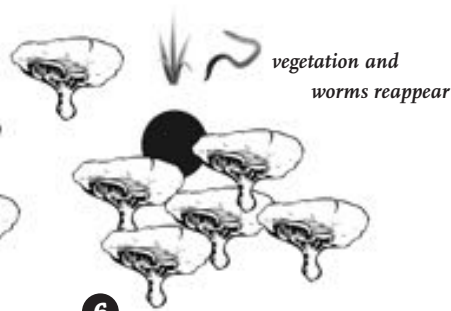
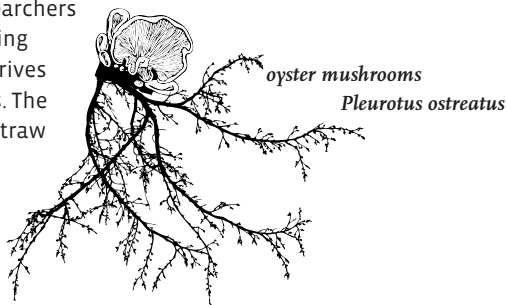
Oyster mushroom mycelia break down hydrocarbons much more effectively when mixed with wood chips and compost than they do on their own. Researchers found one strain of oil-eating oyster mushrooms that thrives in saltwater environments. The mycelium fully colonizes straw soaked with sea water.



5

Local mushrooms

Native mushroom species are best adapted to local conditions and therefore do the best job of cleaning up toxic messes. The timing of plantings also depends on local conditions.



6

Healthy soil

In one test, researchers inoculated diesel-contaminated soil with oyster mushrooms and found that they reduced the concentration of toxic hydrocarbons from a dangerous 10,000 parts per million to just 200 parts per million over a 16-week period. The remediated soil was so clean that regulators approved it for use in landscaping along highways.

Source: Research by Paul Stamets, fungi.com

YES! MAGAZINE GRAPHIC, 2010

network “mothers the seed nursery by providing nutrients and water,” according to the project’s website, “thus protecting the growing trees from disease, drought, and famine.”

The LifeBox project will utilize human networks as well as mycelial ones. Just as this article appears in print, a new app will be released for iPhone, Droid, and iPad that allows users to post the exact location and species of their Lifebox grove and see where others have been planted, too. It’s a “blending of nature-based and computer-based technologies,” Stamets says. “We need to take the best of each.”

His company is also developing fungus-based pesticides that kill ants and termites, as well as a technology that allows sacks of mycelia to filter toxins and dangerous bacteria from farm waste. In each case, the “mycotechnology” allows people to do an everyday task, but with a drastically reduced footprint of toxins and wastes.

Far from being the poisonous or dirty pests many people think they are, Stamets says, fungi provide some of the cleanest solutions to our environmental problems.

Mycelia Move to the Mainstream

If you find these ideas fascinating, you are not alone. There is a growing community of people who share Stamets’ confidence in the ability of fungi to help save the planet. They include organic farmers who use his company’s plant-growth enhancements and farm-waste abatement technologies, mushroom growers who attend his sought-after seminars (sold out through November 2010), and parents who use his LifeBoxes and growing kits to teach their kids about fungi.

They also include leaders of media and culture. In 2008, Stamets was named a “Green-O-Vator” by *National Geographic Adventure* magazine and one of the 50 Visionaries of the Year by *Utne Reader*. He recently shared a

stage with rocker Sting at an event about social change, and he appeared in Leonardo DiCaprio’s film *The 11th Hour*, a documentary about the need for a radical shift in how humans treat the earth.

Does this mean we can expect to see bins of mushrooms breaking down waste in the Gulf sometime soon? For better or worse, that depends on the decisions of the Coast Guard and British Petroleum officials currently in charge of the cleanup. While they might not be ready to recruit the fungal kingdom just yet, Stamets and the workers at his company are hard at work to make sure that the solutions are ready to go as soon as opportunity appears. 🍄



James Trimarco is a writer and activist based in New York City, and a consulting editor for YES!

🍄 www.YesMagazine.org/paul-stamets
6 ways mushrooms can save the world

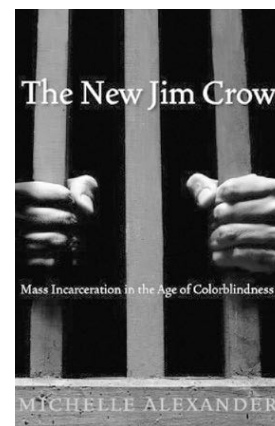
The Return of Jim Crow

How Today's Criminal Justice System Takes Up Where Slavery and Segregation Left Off



ZOCALOPUBLICSQUARE PHOTO

Michelle Alexander



**The New Jim Crow:
Mass Incarceration in the Age
of Colorblindness**

MICHELLE ALEXANDER

The New Press, 2010, 290 pages, \$27.95

REVIEWED BY CAROL ESTES

Fifty years ago, James Baldwin accused his country and his countrymen of destroying hundreds of thousands of black lives. They “do not know it and do not want to know it,” he wrote. “It is their innocence which constitutes the crime.”

Today, in the era of mass incarceration and supposed colorblindness, the white guilt of the Civil Rights era has exhausted itself, as Barack Obama has observed, and the number of African American lives we destroy through not knowing now runs in the millions.

But Michelle Alexander’s stunning and important book may be a turning point in the struggle for racial justice.

It’s a book, according to Alexander, for people “who do not yet appreciate the magnitude of the crisis faced by communities of color as a result of mass incarceration.” It’s a book to end not knowing.

IT’S EARLY APRIL, a sunny day after months of rain. The grassy prison yard at Washington State Reformatory looks inviting compared to the guard towers, cell blocks, chain link, and curls of razor wire that surround it. But many prisoners are passing up the precious sunshine and filing into the

prison chapel to hear Michelle Alexander talk about *The New Jim Crow*.

This will be Alexander's second lecture at the prison today. Last hour, she was scheduled to talk to the prison guards, counselors, and administrators. Fewer than 10 chose to come, so she spoke to a nearly empty room.

Is this the willful not knowing?

Now she looks out on more than a hundred felons, mostly black men, wearing the brown jackets and pants that for some reason the state prefers. A former ACLU civil rights attorney and now a law professor at Ohio State University, Alexander summarizes the argument she makes in her book. It is essentially this: The system of mass incarceration that has resulted in putting one out of every 31 adults behind bars, on probation or on parole, is merely a redesign of the two race-based caste systems that preceded it: slavery and Jim Crow.

The parallels she describes are chilling.

"Today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans," she says. A person who is convicted of, or pleads guilty to, a felony drug offense is denied health and welfare benefits, food stamps, public housing, and federal student loans and grants. His driver's license may be automatically suspended, and he cannot qualify for many employment opportunities and professional licenses. He will not be permitted to enlist in the military. If he is a citizen, in some states he will lose the right to vote; if not a citizen, he becomes immediately deportable.

Alexander is particularly adept, both in person and on the printed page, at explaining why and how a system purportedly designed to lock up criminals, not people of color, has become even more effective at sidelining African Americans than the overtly race-based

Jim Crow system.

Her question for those who see the racial inequity as merely an unintended consequence of the War on Drugs is: If the consequences are unintended, then why aren't we willing to change the drug laws to eliminate the inequity?

To those who persist in believing that African Americans deserve to be locked up at a higher rate than whites because they commit more crimes, she explains the impact of the discretion our law enforcement agencies enjoy in deciding where drug laws are enforced and where they're not. Where are illegal drugs more likely to be found than at a fraternity house? Yet how often are frat houses subject to early morning police raids?

When Alexander asks the prisoners for questions, hands go up all over the room. She answers one or two before the loudspeaker crackles with "Movement's open! Movement's open!" The men have 10 minutes to "move" back to their cells, and their disappointment is clear. They are eager to know about the grassroots movement she proposes, about Supreme Court decisions, and the assaults on habeas corpus. But they won't get a chance to speak.

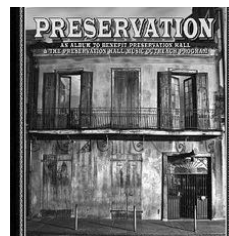
The New Jim Crow is a call to high-stakes caring across color lines—the kind of revolutionary, grassroots caring that will certainly cost us our innocence and some of our material advantages. But it can also restore the moral force at the heart of the civil rights movement and ensure that we finally listen to—and advocate for—criminals.

Read it and be ashamed and angry for the lives and innocence lost. Read it and start a revolution of caring.

Carol Estes, a former managing editor of YES!, is executive director of University Beyond Bars, a nonprofit organization that provides college classes to prisoners. She helped arrange Alexander's talk at the prison.

YES! PICKS ::

Musical inspiration while putting out this issue



Preservation

This is pure fun. New Orleans jazz, blues, and swing sung by an A-list roster. Highlights include **Ani DiFranco** on a swinging "Freight Train" and **Angelique Kidjo** with a perky "La Vie En Rose." But nothing can top **Tom Waits** growling out "Tootie Ma Is a Big Fine Thing." A benefit CD for Preservation Hall.



Earth Amplified

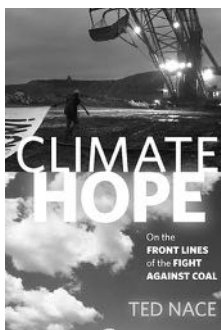
A mix of hip hop, reggae, and blues, with echos of Marvin Gaye, this new CD by Oakland vocalist and activist **Seasunz** and Brooklyn's **J.Bless** tells hard truths about the climate, food, poverty, and prison while lifting the spirits and giving you a reason to dance.



Live in London

Wry, graceful, gravelly, **Leonard Cohen** reviews his 40-year songbook with a supremely talented band. The audience cheers during "Tower of Song" when he sings, "I was born with the gift of a golden voice." You should hope to be 73 like this.

🎶 Have a listen at
www.YesMagazine.org/music



Climate Hope: On the Front Lines in the Fight Against Coal

TED NACE

CoalSwarm, 2009, 288 pages, \$15

REVIEWED BY MARK ENGLER

The numbers alone say a lot: In early 2007 a U.S. Department of Energy document reported that 151 new coal-burning power plants—the most egregious single source of greenhouse gas emissions—were scheduled for construction. By late 2009, at least 109 of them had been shelved amid a surge of popular outrage.

Ted Nace's *Climate Hope* tells the story behind this momentous reversal. "Of course, the anti-coal movement could not claim to be the only reason these plants had been stopped," he writes. "Typically it was a combination: bad economics plus a good shove by activists. But the progress was undeniable."

From "I love mountains" advocates in West Virginia, to Navajo activists in the Southwest, to high plains environmentalists in Wyoming and Montana whom Nace dubs "Cowboys Against Coal," committed citizens were able to "raise the negatives" of coal-plant construction through lobbying, direct action, and environmental protection lawsuits. At the same time, these coal opponents highlighted the economic viability of alternative energy.

Once geographically isolated, these campaigners have connected in recent years through e-mail listserves and web pages such as Nace's own invaluable Coal Swarm site.

In large part, *Climate Hope* is a memoir of how Nace became a node at the center of this movement. The sole staffer of a group called Green Delaware writes to Nace, "This is hard work, with low pay and lots of frustrations along the way. I can't stress enough the encouragement factor as a main value" of the "No New Coal Plants" listserve that both men had helped to nurture.

Early victories in stopping coal plants—when Minnesota campaigners, for example, halted a proposed project using community organizing and deft economic research—added fortitude to efforts in other parts of the country. "Wherever activists fighting a coal project in one place are able to get regulators or banks to commit to a certain set of restrictions ... the campaigns against other projects make those conditions the new baseline that must be met or beat," Rainforest Action Network's Matt Leonard tells Nace. "Successes in blocking coal plants are piggybacking from one to the next."

Alongside his own story, Nace makes a strategic argument: "Want to stop global warming? Forget oil and gas. Stop coal." He cites statistics indicating that, "to offset the carbon dioxide produced by a single coal plant, 850,000 SUV drivers would have to switch to Priuses." But as important to Nace is the idea that, amid all the abstraction in the climate change debate, closing coal plants represents a concrete and achievable goal.

Many others evidently concur. An appendix to the book provides a detailed list of the escalating series of direct actions around coal that have taken place in the past few years. The catalogue of civil disobedience, printed in a tiny font, covers 30 pages. Some of us might not believe that the struggle over global climate change will end with the fight against coal. But confronted with this impressive litany, all must agree: It is a fine beginning.

Mark Engler is a senior analyst with Foreign Policy In Focus and author of *How to Rule the World: The Coming Battle Over the Global Economy* (Nation Books, 2008).



Diet for a Hot Planet: The Climate Crisis at the End of Your Fork and What You Can Do About It

ANNA LAPPÉ

Bloomsbury USA, 2010, 336 pages, \$24

REVIEWED BY KATHLEEN YALE

By now most of us know to choose healthy foods and eat locally, but how often do we think about how our daily food choices contribute to climate change? Food activist Anna Lappé (daughter of author Frances Moore Lappé) connects global warming to the way we eat in *Diet for a Hot Planet*.

Extensively researched and written in a conversational tone, the book outlines, for example, why eating factory-farmed meat and palm-oil-saturated junk food may be worse for the planet than leaving your lights on at home while rumbling around town in an SUV. Agriculture and livestock-industry emissions are even higher than those in the transportation sector. And the demand for palm oil leads to plantations that destroy millions of acres of rainforests and peatlands, releasing massive amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

In the end, Lappé gives you a taste of everything, but you'll have to stay at the table to truly get full. To borrow a phrase from its pages, this book is a "resolution to start a revolution." Get informed. Get angry. Get inspired. Figuring out the actual costs of what you're putting into your body is a great place to start.

Kathleen Yale is reviews editor at *Orion Magazine*.

www.YesMagazine.org/hot-planet

How to start a conversation about our food values

FILM ::



David Strathairn in *The People Speak*

The People Speak

Directed by Anthony Arnove and Chris Moore, 2009, 150 min.

REVIEWED BY ROBERT JENSEN

History typically is taught through the “great man” approach—focusing on presidents, generals, and tycoons—wrapped in an ideology that asserts the nobility of all things American. Rarely do we hear from ordinary people who resisted those great (white) men.

No one has done more to challenge the standard account of U.S. history than the late Howard Zinn, whose book, *A People's History of the United States*, is a perennial best-seller. The new documentary film, *The People Speak*, based on the original documents collected in the companion volume *Voices of a People's History of the United States*, brings Zinn's insights to the screen at a time they are needed more than ever.

Zinn and Anthony Arnove, co-editor of the *Voices* volume, assembled a first-rate cast with the help of Matt Damon, Zinn's longtime friend. The actors' readings of those original documents onstage at Boston's Majestic Theatre bring to life the people and ideas that have animated struggles for social, political, and economic justice.

We recognize some of these historical voices. Kerry Washington provides a sassy reading of “Ain't I a Woman,” capturing the anger, contempt, and sadness of Sojourner Truth's challenge to racism and sexism.

Others are anonymous, such as the member of the Industrial Workers of the World, whose analysis of World War I, read by Viggo Mortensen, still rings true: “This war is a businessman's war, and we don't see why we should go out and get shot in order to save the lovely state of affairs which we now enjoy.”

The timing of this project—*The People Speak* was originally broadcast on the History Channel in December 2009—took a bit of the edge off the sad news of Zinn's death a month later. It's wonderful to watch him wrap up the performance by pointing to the evidence for hope in “small acts multiplied by the millions” that make social movements and create change.

Robert Jensen is a journalism professor at the University of Texas at Austin, and author of several books. Information and articles at uts.cc.utexas.edu/~rjensen.



www.YesMagazine.org/films55
Watch the trailers

YES! PICKS ::

Maddening and motivating independent films

Black Wave

Directed by Robert Cornellier, 2008, 99 min.

Nearly 20 years after the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the *Black Wave* film crew traveled to Cordova, Alaska, and found ravaged beaches, fishing-dependent families reduced to poverty, and a community reduced to despair. Made before the Deepwater Horizon disaster, the film presents a haunting prospect for residents along the Gulf of Mexico.

A Village Called Versailles

Directed by S. Leo Chiang, 2009, 67 min.

New Orleans' Vietnamese neighborhood, home to 8,000 people, began in 1975 as the Versailles Arms public housing project. For years, its refugee founders felt divided from their Americanized children, but when Hurricane Katrina hit, the youth of Versailles Arms experienced exile as their parents had. The film tells a powerful story of how this group healed generational differences and led their once-shy community in rebuilding.



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FISHY BUSINESS

Is it better to eat wild or farmed fish?

The answer varies depending on the fish. The issue of wild versus farmed leads to questions about fishing and farming methods, and whether a species has been overfished.

The most common industrial fishing methods—bottom trawling and dredging—use enormous nets and raking bars that drag across the ocean floor. This destroys habitats and collects a large “bycatch”—unwanted ocean creatures that are killed or injured when caught in the nets. What’s more, many species such as Atlantic salmon, Atlantic halibut, and bigeye tuna are overfished—so depleted that they are unable to replenish their populations. Lower-impact fishing methods, such as the use of pots and traps, or trolling, are more sustainable.

Fish farms can cause their own set of problems, such as the spread of sea lice to wild fish, use of synthetic feed, and accumulation of fish waste on the ocean floor. Picking fish that are farmed responsibly from your nearest coast or freshwater farm may allow you to inquire more deeply into the practices of the farm, will lower the carbon footprint associated with transport,

and the fish will be fresher than those that have traveled longer distances.

Organizations such as the Marine Stewardship Council issue eco-labels to certify fish, fish farms, fisheries, and supply chain businesses as sustainable and environmentally responsible. Seafood Watch pocket guides, offered by the Monterey Bay Aquarium, rate farmed and wild species as “best,” “good,” and “avoid.” Pocket guides can be obtained online at the Monterey Bay Aquarium website and at some grocery stores and restaurants.

There are many widely agreed-upon good and bad fish choices. Among the best: wild Alaskan and Pacific salmon, domestically farmed catfish, rainbow trout, and shellfish like oysters, clams, and mussels. Avoid bluefin tuna, Atlantic cod, red snapper, and grouper due to overfishing and harmful fishing methods. When in doubt, do additional research and ask questions. Doing so alerts markets and restaurants of consumer demand for more sustainable options.—T.R.

GREEN WASHING

My new front-load washing machine is more energy-efficient, but I was told not to use eco-friendly detergent in it. Are my efforts to be energy and water conscious a wash?

Our Issue 55 researchers

After YES!, Kelly Shea will return to Ball State University for her last year of journalism school. She hopes to continue serving as an unofficial spokesperson for soap nuts. Tiffany Ran will spend another quarter at YES! and Hitchcock Restaurant, patrolling for slugs at the YES! garden, mincing shallots, and juggling editorial duties.



KAITLIN BAILEY FOR YES! MAGAZINE

Kelly Shea

Tiffany Ran

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the average family cycles through 400 loads of laundry each year. Washing machines are second only to toilets in residential water use: The typical top-loader guzzles 41 gallons per load. Switching to a front-loader cuts the rate nearly in half and saves an equal amount of energy.

The person who told you not to use eco-friendly soap

may have been concerned about a potentially moldy side effect: residue build-up. This problem isn’t restricted to natural products, though. Most new front-loaders leave grime because people stick with their old soap habits, believing more suds to be better. But front-loaders require far less detergent (and water) than top-loaders because the machine tumbles, rather than agitates, garments.

Manufacturers don’t always

state clearly that front-loaders require “high efficiency” or “HE” soap. This concentrated formula is designed to work with less water, but you can still overuse it—even if you follow instructions. Generally, a tablespoon is enough for a load (although one-quarter cup may be recommended). Any excess could result in mildew and damage to your machine.

Don’t give up on the benefits of natural (or mostly natural) soap. The alternative, using commercial detergents, can be toxic to both your health and the environment. These detergents contain petroleum by-products to reduce the surface tension of water and ease washing; the EPA has linked their synthetic ingredients to skin irritation, asthma, and even cancer. Phosphates, another common—but unnecessary—ingredient, prevent dirt from settling on clothes but can kill fish in local streams.

Use nontoxic, biodegradable products that are highly concentrated. Among the brands available at many grocery stores are Seventh Generation, ECOS, and Biokleen. If you’d like to save money, DIY laundry soap is as easy as combining two cups of grated soap (try Castille, made from vegetable oils rather than animal products), one cup of washing soda (found in the laundry aisle of most grocery stores), and one cup of borax (a natural mineral compound also readily available). One tablespoon of this powder is sufficient.

To rid your front-loader of residue, run an empty load with a cup of vinegar, then wipe the interior with a water- and vinegar-soaked rag. Meanwhile, keep the door open after use to prevent any filmy traces of over-sudsing. —K.S.



KAITLIN BAILEY FOR YES! MAGAZINE

YES! PICKS :: Spotless by Nature

Go outside and pick some soap: That’s what people in India have said for years about the fruit of the Chinese soapberry tree. The berries’ skin contains saponin, a natural yet effective cleansing agent.

You can buy the dried fruit, gaining worldwide popularity as “soap nuts,” in batches of five or by the pound. Here’s how soap nuts work around the house:

LAUNDRY: Most soap-nut distributors

provide a small cloth bag to hold berries in the washing machine. We used five nuts to wash five loads (fewer could be used in warm water), and our garments and towels emerged clean, odorless, and soft every time.

MULTI-PURPOSE CLEANER: Boil four soap nuts in 2 cups of water for 30 minutes, then let cool. Strain the liquid and use it to clean countertops and appliances; it can be kept at room temperature for up to three weeks. In a test on a shower, it eliminated soap scum.

SHAMPOO: Pour half a cup of the liquid into a food processor and add a few drops of your favorite oil (we used tea tree). Blend into a thick lather and use immediately; it works best when left on for about five minutes.

Soap nuts should be discarded when they begin to soften and fade in color, but they are compostable and can be left in gardens to repel pests. Online distributors such as NaturOli or Bubble and Bee sell certified organic nuts by weight. Roughly a quarter-pound can start at \$7.95.—K.S.

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HAS THE PROMISE OF THE STORIES WE'VE PUBLISHED TURNED INTO REALITY?



PHOTO BY GAIA DAVIES

Former school counselor Kurtland Davies removes invasive Virginia Creeper vines as part of eco-restoration of the coastal dune hammock on the property of the Unitarian Universalist Society in Ormond Beach, Fla.

Lessons From Nature Continue

12 YEARS AGO ...

A group of at-risk youth from Pan Terra Alternative High School in Vancouver, Wash., turned to nature to work through trauma, abuse, and other emotional problems. Larry (Kurtland) Davies, then a counselor at the school, started the NatureConnect program based on the eco-psychology teachings of Michael Cohen, who promotes seeking peace and well-being from the natural world. With NatureConnect, Davies asked the Pan Terra students to clear weeds from a neglected woodland and care for native plants; he drew metaphors from

nature to teach them about growth and healing. When the Vancouver School Board decided to turn the woodland into a parking lot, the students fought unsuccessfully to save the land. But with permission from the school district and the city, they extracted some of the native plants from the area slated for construction and helped restore an abandoned wetland next to Bagley Park. The students cleared the wetland of invasive weeds and garbage, planted trees, and rehabilitated native plants with the help of inmates from work-release programs and members of a local neighborhood association.

TODAY ...

The city of Vancouver maintains the wetland, which is protected by local environmental regulations. The native plants are healthy and thriving.

Davies retired from the school district in 1999 and moved to Florida with his wife, where they hosted NatureConnect workshops with a church in Bradenton.

In 2005, Davies formed a group with church members from the Unitarian Universalist Society of Daytona Beach to work toward becoming a Green Sanctuary—a congregation recognized for its commitment to the Earth and sustainable living—by installing solar panels, planting urban gardens, and cleaning up local rivers. Davies continues to speak at churches to encourage other congregations to become better stewards.

—Tiffany Ran

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