



Newsletter

The Grove - Transition Initiative

#3 - October 2009

As I put hands to the keyboard for our third newsletter, I find the task is already made easier by having some history, a whole three months, to reflect upon. In doing so, one of the things that strikes me as a strength of the Transition Towns movement is its openness to networking and cooperation with a wide range of other interest groups without any ambition beyond our imperative to build resilience into our communities and to assist the inevitable transition to a low-carbon future.

An example of this is the Brisbane Organic Growers, affectionately known as BOGI. One of the key issues for the Transition Towns movement is local food production so it's not surprising that, at the annual BOGI fair on 4th October there were some familiar faces from various local Transition Initiatives. Similarly, at the Northey Street City Farm Spring Equinox Circus Day on 19th September. Food featured large at the Hillbrook Sustainability Day where we established a connection with the Sub-Tropical Fruit Club Of Queensland. These groups provide a great knowledge resource as we work to achieve sustainable local food supplies through a range of cooperative food growing and distribution enterprises.

I find it impossible not to have a sense of urgency about getting our local Transition Initiative established, which basically means having more people participating. You can be sure that there are a good number of residents in Ferny Grove and Upper Kedron who are concerned about the threats posed by Climate Change and Peak Oil, but how are we to connect with them, let alone reach out to those who have not yet woken up to the issues?

With the movie night in The Gap on the horizon, and knowing that we would be away on holiday for the preceding week, the best I

could come up with was a letter-box drop. I approached Geoff Wilson's electorate office in our local shopping centre about photocopying and they generously agreed to supply the paper, photocopy and fold 1000 flyers promoting the Movie Night and The Grove Transition Initiative. I carefully selected some of the less hilly areas in The Grove and hand delivered these flyers before we went away. Geoff's office also offered to provide a gift basket as a fund-raising raffle prize which was much appreciated. Planning the future, growing local food, and attending movie nights, are probably more interesting and more fun than fund-raising, however they all have associated costs that can only be met through effective fund-raising campaigns. With the raffle, we have taken another step towards financial responsibility. Also, fund raising can be another great way to make community connections.

I'm always searching to learn from the creative ways by which others have managed to communicate our essential message, particularly about climate change which seems the most urgent right now. One that I came across was by Greg Craven who has developed a low-budget but effective video (*How it all Ends*), written a book (*What's the Worst that could Happen?*), and developed a website, to make a difference.

His web-site opens with the statement: "*Anyway you look at the question of global warming, the stakes seem to be the whole world*". His video goes on to develop a risk-management approach to climate change, which I have tried to summarise elsewhere. I have downloaded the high resolution version of the movie (225Mb mp4 file) which I can supply on DVD if anyone would like it. This movie (along with Annie Leonard's *The Story of Stuff*) is an example of how one person, plus some creative imagination, can create effective and engaging communications.

Our holiday started with the Tweed River Classic Boat Regatta and continued with delightful progress down the NSW coast exploring various rivers and camp sites en route. Our destination was the Annual General Meeting of a rural land-sharing cooperative, near Kempsey, of which we are members. As always, it was fascinating and challenging to engage in the issues of governance in a community of 80 members (and their families), variously committed to the ideals of sustainability, permaculture, self-reliance and rugged individualism.

While away I finished reading Thomas Homer-Dixon's book "The Upside of Down". This is a wonderful book full of historical, scientific and philosophical insights to help us understand, and respond to the issues of climate change, energy crises, population stress and economic instability. In one paragraph that struck me as particularly relevant to our journey he quotes Buzz Holling: "*The only way to approach such a period, in which uncertainty is very large and one cannot predict what the future holds, is not to predict, but to experiment and act inventively and exuberantly via diverse adventures in living.*"

On our return journey we stayed a second night at Mullumbimby to see the film "Homegrown" presented by their local community garden group with strong support from the Byron Shire council. The film was shown in the Mullumbimby council chambers, MC'd by the Byron Shire mayor, and drew a capacity crowd of around 200. This was about double the numbers for their previous event and they reckon the next event will have to be held in the town hall. It's impossible to avoid the impression that there is widespread and growing interest in local food production.

We were back from our holiday just in time for the movie night at The Gap on 21 October. The films were *Think Global: Eat Local* and *The Story of Stuff*. Some facilitated discussion took place after each film and, notable to me, was the energetic 'buzz' that pervaded the evening. There were quite a few new faces and I'm sure some new

network connections were established.

Unfortunately Chris Wright, who heads up The Gap Transition Initiative, was away caring for his sick father and it fell to me to briefly introduce the Transition Towns movement to the audience. While I am hopeless at humour myself, I am a great believer that it is a powerful aid to effective communication, especially on difficult topics. So, I did a bit of joke surfing and added some results below.

That Peace Hall in Albion is certainly an interesting place. As well as providing a home for BOGI and the Sub-Tropical Fruit Club Of Queensland, it is the monthly meeting place for the Alternative Technology Association. The October meeting of ATA included presentations about Solar-Tube Skylights, and Green Loan Home Assessments, both interesting topics and relevant to our objectives.

As October draws to a close, we are mindful that the December Copenhagen Climate Change summit draws nearer. Campaigning continues to raise public and political awareness. On Sunday 24 October, people in 181 countries came together for the most widespread day of environmental action in the planet's history. At over 5200 events around the world, people gathered to call for strong action and bold leadership on the climate crisis, particularly a commitment to reducing atmospheric CO2 to less than 350 parts per million. In Brisbane, events were held at West End, New Farm Park and Peace Hall Albion involving folks from many activist groups including Transition Towns, Friends of the Earth, Make Poverty History, World Vision, ATA and many others. Check out the 350.org web site for a review.

Our local web site continues to evolve. There are links to more information on most of the items above. At this stage we are concentrating mainly on content and structure, rather than presentation. Please let us know of any events or resources you think should be included, especially those local to The Grove. Once we are confident that the structure is and content appropriate we will review the issues of style and presentation.

A Different Take on Global Warming with acknowledgements to Greg Craven

Greg Craven grew up on a farm in Oregon, experimented with different jobs for a decade, and finally found his calling as a high school physics and chemistry teacher. His main qualification for proposing a layman's approach to climate change is having borrowed the 30 brains in his classroom every period to mull questions of science and critical thinking for the last ten years. He's found there's no better way to refine a thought than to toss it out in front of a roomful of critical teenagers is a bit surprised to find he's written a book as a result.

Look. Anyway you look at the question of global warming, the stakes seem to be the whole world.

The skeptics promise global economic DOOM if we take hasty action on an unproven question. The activists warn of global climate DOOM if we don't take immediate action on an imminent threat. And the only way to know for sure who's right is to let the experiment play itself out.

Unfortunately, we're in the test tube. So there's got to be a better way to go about this besides shouting at each other.

I'm no expert, but as a high school science teacher, I am pretty familiar with how the lay person intersects with science. So in an online video two years ago, I offered a suggestion for how to cut through the shouting match and draw your own conclusion in the debate, without needing to decide which side to believe. It centers on a simple little 2-by-2 "decision grid," and I asked for suggestions on how to improve it.

Two years later, "The Most Terrifying Video You'll Ever See" has collected over 7.5 million views, spawned 7 hours of follow-up videos, led to an offer of my own t.v. show (thanks, but no thanks), and ultimately resulted in a book. (Geez. I was just trying to offer a suggestion.)

| | | ACTION? | |
|-----|-------|-----------------------------------|--|
| | | A "YES" | B "NO" |
| G W | False | Cost \$ Global Depression ☹ | Status Quo 😊 |
| | True | Cost \$ Saved Our Hides ☹ | Global Catastrophes - Environmental - Social - Political - Public Health - Economic |

I guess there must be something to that little grid. -Greg Craven

Note: In Greg's grid we get to choose Yes or No to taking action on climate change. Global Warming will turn out to be False or True so we have four possible outcomes.

1. We DO take action, incur the cost, suffer the global depression and Global Warming DOESN'T happen. Consequences - Everyone is unhappy, but we survive to rebuild.
2. We DON'T take action and incur the cost, and Global Warming DOESN'T happen. Consequences - Everyone is happy.
3. We DO take action, incur the cost, suffer the global depression and Global Warming DOES happen. Consequences - At least we saved our hides.
4. We take DONT action, incur the cost, suffer the global depression and Global Warming DOES happen. Consequences - Global Catastrophe.

We simply need to weigh up the likelihood and the consequences of each scenario. Greg suggests that, in doing so, we consider the mainstream scientific opinions on the matter from web-sites like -

- Australian Bureau of Meteorology
- CSIRO (Australia)
- The US National Academies (Science, Engineering, Medicine, Research)
- American Association for the Advancement of Science
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen December 7 - 18

Let's think about using Humour to communicate about Climate Change

From INTELLIGENT LIFE magazine, Spring 2008

*What is the shortest book in the world? "The Environmentalists' Book of Jokes", of course. It's not a hard point to prove. Pick up the 550-page book *Man Walks into a Bar*, which claims to be the biggest joke book in the world with more than 6,000 entries. The jokes are divided into more than 400 themes that run from accidents to zoos.*

Look under C and the index goes from civil servants to cloning. (No mention of climate change.) Look under G and it goes from giraffes to golf. (No mention of global warming.) Look under E, and there's no earth or environment; look under P and there's no planet. This is the future we face: rivers dry up, sea levels rise, animals become extinct"and there won't be a single blonde joke, or lightbulb joke, or three-men-walked-into-a-bar joke about any of it.

There are half-a-dozen reasons why this could be the case. The first is, climate change is too serious for humour. But 'Man Walks into a Bar' has jokes about death, lepers and suicide. The second is, climate change is simply too boring. But there are jokes about accountancy. The third is, climate change is too preachy and earnest. That probably comes closest.

Research has shown that humor helps reduce hostile feelings. Humor and laughter are incompatible with anger and other negative emotions that makes humor such a great tool for conflict management. A lighter approach is also an effective tool for easing into sensitive or awkward topics. Like sticking your toe in the water before jumping in, the reaction of the other person tells you whether it's safe to proceed with a more serious statement about the sensitive issue.

"Humour is something that thrives between man's aspirations and his limitations. There is more logic in humour than in anything else. Because, you see, humour is truth."
(Victor Borge)

"If you're going to tell people the truth, you'd better make them laugh. Otherwise, they'll kill you." (George Bernard Shaw)

It's also true that humour is infectious so, if we want our message to 'go viral', humour will help. For example, I did some 'joke-surfing' on the net and this led to -

Q: How many climate skeptics does it take to change a lightbulb?

A: None. It's too early to say if the lightbulb needs changing.

Within a couple of days this had generated three original alternative answers -

A: None. Clearly the bulb is going through a natural dark cycle and will start shining again soon.

A: None. There is no consensus a new bulb will produce any light.

A: None, all light comes from the sun and cannot be affected by human activities.

(Thanks to Mike Clark)

Then, reading Mark Diesendorf's book Climate Action led me to Australian cartoonist Simon Kneebone.

This is a serious book that presents a "menu of strategies" for activists and citizens who want to pressure governments and businesses to accelerate significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Simon Kneebone's cartoons powerfully convey 'the truth' of what is happening.



That's it for October.

Please check out our web-site at http://www.tennock.com/j_data/TTFG/

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