



# BeFriending Creation

Newsletter of Quaker Earthcare Witness

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## Clawing our way back from Extinction

by Louis Cox

**B**IOLOGISTS recently forecast that polar bears will be virtually extinct outside of zoos by mid-century, due to rapid melting of the arctic sea ice that they require for hunting—the result of accelerating global warming.

Many folks will no doubt mourn the loss of such a magnificent member of Earth's "charismatic megafauna," but most will not otherwise feel personally affected.

In the Greenhouse World of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are no longer talking about the occasional disappearance of a marginal species due to destruction of its habitat—a Dodo or Dusky Seaside Sparrow that ends up stuffed and mounted in a glass case in a dusty museum. We are now facing massive *Extinctions*, with a capital "E," of major strands of the Web of Life, to which we are all interconnected.

History teaches us that even large populations of highly prolific creatures can crash dramatically. On the Great Plains, vast herds of American Bison, numbering in the tens of millions, shrank to a few thousand in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. That was, of course, the intended result of a decade of relentless extermination, but the rapid disappearance of the Passenger Pigeon, whose great flocks once darkened frontier America's skies with their incalculable millions, remains more of a mystery—a testament to the fragility of many life forms.

And we are learning in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century that human-induced climate change is making many forms of life even more fragile—down to the tiny organisms at the base of the ocean food chain. The fabulous Golden Toad of the cloud forests of Costa Rica was discovered in the late 1990s, only to vanish completely a just few years later. During this period, the forests' moist cloud cover underwent an unprec-



edented shift that has been attributed at least in part to global warming. This created drier conditions in the toads' habitats that their skins might not have been able to tolerate and may have disrupted several critical cycles of reproduction.

Climate change is occurring so rapidly in many parts of the world that many threatened species do not have time to adapt, or they run out of higher elevations to shift to, or they are blocked from migrating poleward by highways and other human-built barriers.

Meanwhile armies of bulldozers and chain saws are aiding the rape of rainforests worldwide, dooming untold thousands of other species, often before they can even be identified. Everywhere roads are fragmenting the habitats of species that cannot tolerate such constriction of their territories. Sometimes species are decimated by new disease strains that have spread among nonresistant populations.

**D**OES the Extinction bell toll for us humans as well? The great Irish potato famine of the 1840s wiped out millions, yet today we are similarly vulnerable because our food supply is based largely on a few major crop strains that can be destroyed by mutating strains of plant diseases. The Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918 killed more people than the Great War, and there is no reason to rule out a worse pandemic to come, given the increase in travel and trade that can quickly spread diseases around the globe.

It is said that endangered species, like condors and desert tortoises, tend to be those that have difficulty adapting to changing conditions. Why then should humans, who are notable for having adapted to a wide range of climates and resource bases, have to worry about Extinction?

**Extinction next page >>**

>> **Extinction**, from page 1

We would not be so complacent if we realized that global climate change is disrupting virtually all of the ecosystems to which human communities have adapted, and that *Homo sapiens* doesn't have as much genetic diversity as many other species, due to a previous close brush with extinction around 100,000 years ago.

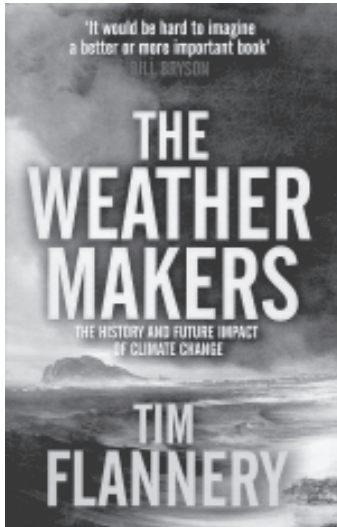
Waking up to our own vulnerability is one of the ways that Tim Flannery, author of *The Weather Makers, The History and Future Impact of Climate Change*, (Penguin Books, 2005) hopes that we humans will take much more seriously the ecological instabilities that are manifesting all over the planet.

*The Weather Makers* is an excellent primer on the geology and physics of climate, the development of modern climatology, and the challenges faced in predicting future climate changes. One thing is certain: Conditions for most life forms on Earth are going to deteriorate significantly in the decades ahead.

Flannery's best contribution to this field is the tour he takes through Earth's major climate zones, graphically explaining the kinds of ecological disruptions to expect at different degrees of temperature rise. As worrisome as these prospects are, Flannery goes on to describe the much greater danger of *run-away heating*, due to collapse of the Gulf Stream, the die-off of the Amazonian rainforests, and methane release from a warming sea floor—or a perfect storm of all three.

**I**n the search for a more hopeful future, Flannery evaluates various renewable energy technologies—wind, solar, hydro, nuclear, geothermal, etc., as well as schemes for carbon sequestration. He is apparently more optimistic about the sufficiency of technological solutions than many other people who are looking at the same data. He mentions population growth only as part of the problem, along with exponential growth in economic activity and consumption.

I would have liked to see him include the imperative of reducing population and material consumption, along with the advantages of simpler living based on our essential kinship to the community of life—from plankton to polar bears. ❖



## ***QEW takes action on the chief cause of Earth's deterioration***

***"We have met the enemy and he is us." –Pogo***

**SINCE ITS FOUNDING** Quaker Earthcare Witness has been concerned about the growing human population. Many of us recognize that most Earthcare problems are caused by, or worsened by, the numbers of people on our planet. The best estimate, using the Ecological Footprint concept, is that we're now using *40 percent more* of the Earth's resources than are available. At this rate, it would take 1.4 planets to support us sustainably—but we only have one!

Unless we can slow our growth rate all other efforts to care for Earth will be wasted. In the past, QEW has prepared a number of thoughtful pamphlets on aspects of population. These are still available on the QEW website or from the QEW office. They help to define the problem and relate it to such issues as adoption, abortion, and immigration.

Half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned. Worldwide it is estimated that 200 million couples wish to limit their fertility but lack access to modern contraceptive methods. Thus there is a huge unmet need for access to and information about family planning.

**RECENTLY** we have wanted to take more direct action. QEW's **Sustainability: Faith & Action working group** now has **two projects** that attempt to both inform people about population issues and to help Quakers set a good example in their own lives.

**1)** Have you seen the small advertisements in *Friends Journal* for the **Men for Men Fund**? M4M is to help Quaker men pay for vasectomies. It is administered through QEW. Vasectomy is safer and less expensive than tubal ligation (the equivalent surgery for a woman). Unfortunately, many more women than men have this fertility-limiting surgery done. If you or someone you know has made the decision to limit your fertility, QEW might be able to help.

**2)** Some religions forbid the use of condoms, even though they can be lifesaving. In Africa, where HIV and AIDS are rampant and many men have multiple sexual partners, latex condoms have the potential to prevent the transmission of this fatal disease and to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Yet one of the world's largest denominations prohibits the use of condoms!

QEW therefore is promoting condom use by providing **"Quaker Condoms."** They're the normal product, but attached is an information card about the urgency of limiting human population growth.

—Richard Grossman  
Durango (Colo.) Friends Meeting

# Riding the bus with Woolman

Hollister Knowlton  
QEW Steering Committee Clerk

**I**RIDE buses a lot these days. I'm writing this on one of a series of buses bringing me back to Philadelphia from Denver, Colorado, where I just spent a wonderful weekend with Mountain View Friends Meeting (more on that, later).

My home city of Philadelphia is not only filled with Quakers, but it is richly served by transit. That makes it an easy place to live without a car. For the last 14 years, the city's buses, commuter trains, and light rail have gotten me almost anywhere I have needed to go. My little row house is directly across the street from a commuter rail station and just a block from a bus hub.

The bus has been my top travel choice for a while now—for reasons of justice—but I didn't always understand it that way. When I traveled to my first QEW meetings in Toronto in October 2000, I took a plane. But I was struck that Kim and Susan Carlyle and Ruah Swennerfelt and Louis Cox, among others, had come by bus. They didn't say much about why they had done so, but it made me think.

In the U.S., intercity buses are the major long-distance conveyance for the poor. They are by far the cheapest mode in most cases. Being awakened abruptly a couple of times in the middle of the night to leave the bus so it can be serviced or to make a transfer and wait an hour or two in a bare-bones station, is a tough way to get a good night's sleep. Long delays that lead to missed connections and hours more of waiting can be discouraging. But I watch young mothers traveling with little children and realize that I have it easy.

So, in the beginning, it occurred to me that traveling by long-distance bus was a way to be in solidarity with the poor. It seemed likely that John Woolman, who chose ship's steerage on his 18<sup>th</sup> century trip to England, would travel by bus if he were with us today. After I gave up my paid work in 2003, traveling by bus became the mode that I could best afford.

More recently there has emerged another compelling reason to choose bus travel. As I've explored the data on which various on-line footprint quizzes are based, I've come across statistics on the relative CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per passenger mile for bus, train, and plane. According to the Native Energy web site (which uses the GHG Protocol Initiative, 2003), here are the carbon footprints of various transit modes:

## Carbon footprints of different travel modes

**Intercity bus—0.18 lb. CO<sub>2</sub>/passenger mile (PPM)**  
**Regional/commuter rail—0.33 lb. PPM**  
**Amtrak train—0.41 lb. PPM**  
**Commuter bus—0.66 lb. PPM**  
**Long-distance plane—0.88 lb. PPM**  
**Medium-distance plane flight—1.0 lb. PPM**  
**Short-distance plane flight—1.28 lb. PPM**



So my travel from Philadelphia to Denver by bus (Greyhound said it was 3,666 miles round trip) burdened the planet with about 6,600 lbs (3.2 tons) of CO<sub>2</sub>. That's a *lot*, but it was half what the train would have been emitted, and about 1/6<sup>th</sup> (18 percent) of what I'd have been responsible for had I gone by plane.

It was a surprise to me to learn that air travel is not the super CO<sub>2</sub> emitter it has been made out to be. A single occupant in a minivan (at 17 mpg) emits as much CO<sub>2</sub> as a plane on a short trip. One difference, it turns out, is that air travel makes it so easy to travel huge distances that we end up traveling many more miles without really thinking about it. Another difference is that the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from a plane are injected directly into the upper atmosphere, where they exert a more immediate greenhouse effect.

One might ask, wouldn't it be just as good to drive a Prius? At 45 to 50 mpg and two occupants, a Prius emits about the same per passenger as a Greyhound bus. But that Prius trip (as is true of any car trip) is *in addition* to the transit trips already scheduled.

This whole matter raises the question, of course, of whether it was right for me to travel to Denver at all, and I had worried about that. Mountain View Friends Meeting had asked QEW for someone to lead a carbon footprinting retreat, and that has become my area of specialty. It also enabled me to visit a long-lost friend and a very elderly uncle whom I've not seen in many years. So, I went.

The retreat was a wonderful and deep experience for me, and I hope for Mountain View Friends. QEW gained two new supporters, and there are many new Colorado Friends whom I now carry in my heart. Also, the 41 hours going and 46 hours returning (the bus blew its engine outside of Denver and we had to be rescued by another bus) afforded me the time to read two and a half books and to make three new friends. I hope that, on balance, the damage I did to Earth was at least somewhat offset. ❖

# Hometown security

## *Plan C: Community Survival Strategies for Peak Oil and Climate Change*

by Pat Murphy

New Society Publishers, 2008

Reviewed by David Millar

Montreal (Quebec) Friends Meeting

*Consider writing this clause into your will: "To my darling children. I, being of unsound mind, leave to you my personal legacy of 3 million pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> and a few hundred thousand pounds of plastic, glass, and miscellaneous toxins. Guard them well. And I also leave you a few hundred pounds of plutonium. Be particularly careful with the plutonium. Think of me, and remember I loved you even though it may not look that way."*

—Pat Murphy

**CIVILIZATION** as we know it is coming to an end—a good thing, as Gandhi might say. A diagram in the book shows that personal recycling will never solve the climate crisis. Even if Americans reduced garbage to zero, they could not achieve the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> by 80 percent by 2050 needed to stop disastrous global warming (see Bill McKibben's <[www.350.org](http://www.350.org)>).

- ❖ **Plan A** is business as usual, the quickest route to ecosystem collapse.
- ❖ **Plan B** is the dream of a green technological fix without giving up infinite growth and consumerism.
- ❖ **Plan C** is for "curtailment and community" (radically deep cuts in consumption and a cooperative, convivial post-carbon way of life).

Pat Murphy is a former computer whiz in aerospace and energy, builder of energy efficient homes, co-writer and producer of the documentary *Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil*. As director of <[www.CommunitySolutions.org](http://www.CommunitySolutions.org)> since 2003, he has been urging Americans to deal with peak oil and climate change. *Plan C* is also a manifesto of the rapidly growing relocalization movement, permaculture, post-carbon, food security (CSA), Transition Towns, eco-villages, etc. See the list on page 5.

Not an easy read, *Plan C* crunches the numbers

from recent scientific studies. It is well indexed, for those who need access to the statistics. For instance, world per-capita CO<sub>2</sub> emission is about 4 tonnes per year, which must be reduced to less than one tonne by 2050. [1 tonne=2,200 lb.] But the average American produces 19.61 tonnes and our level is rising fast! Data in chapters 5 and 6 demolish the consumerist illusions of technical fixes. Mechanized agriculture needs 10 BOE (Barrel of Oil Equivalents) to produce 1 calorie; a generation ago it used 1/5 BOE per calorie.

New green buildings? "Too big, very expensive, one-of-a-kind, architect designed." Needed are retrofits and radical cuts beyond mere conservation. The private car? A dodo. The fuel cell has been "10 years away for 35 years"—a mirage. Biofuels, solar, wind, hydrogen-electric, and nuclear cannot solve the coming energy shortage, nor can the oxymorons of *sustainable development, zero energy buildings, clean coal, and carbon sequestration* which Murphy calls "carbon bequestration."

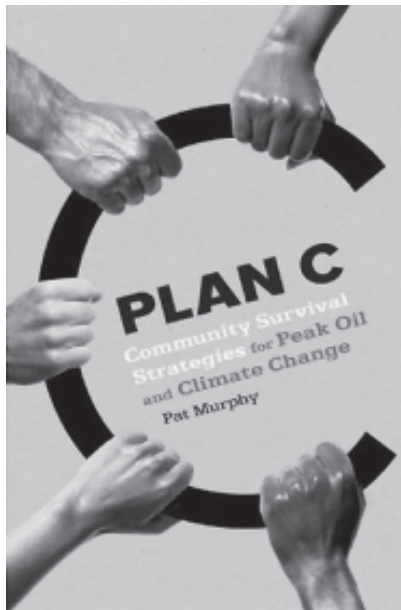
We must also shake our addiction to fossil fuels, the religion of economic growth, consumerism, and rising inequity at home and abroad.

The American way of life and Peak Empire have brought us war and hatred; free trade as a rationale for controlling weaker nations; a fortress mentality; and recurring world financial and energy crises. *Plans A and B guarantee they will continue.*

*Could Europeans survive the winter without fossil fuels from Russia or Saudi Arabia to heat their homes? Would the industrial food system continue to function? Would there be mass starvation in the U.S. and other affected countries? Would the resulting economic chaos lead to another Great Depression?*

**WHAT** then must we do? Chapter 13 on "Food, Health, and Survival" can be summed up in the advice from Michael Pollan's *In Defense of Food*: Don't eat too much, avoid processed foods, eat organic, and mostly plants. More to the point, it shows in detail how our habits of production, transportation, cooking, and nutrition must be transformed. And in the coming mind shift, community must replace consumerism. Learn from Cuba and Kerala, India, which provide high education levels, food security, and free healthcare.

Page 5 >>



*Values of novelty, comfort, convenience, ease, fashion, indulgence, luxury, and competition... must give way to different values such as cooperation, temperance, prudence, moderation, conviviality and charity... Those who desire to make the transition successfully with minimal risk must start now to toughen and strengthen themselves physically and psychologically for difficult times to come. Such people would be more prepared to live in a future that is poorer in material goods but richer in spiritual, psychological, and community benefits.*

**K**ICK the media habit, urges Chapter 15, pointing out how our *entertainment* teaches consumption, competition, and violence; dumbs us down; protects us from reality; and nourishes our illusions.

Housing (currently responsible for 39 percent of U.S. CO<sub>2</sub>): Cut heat loss and wasteful appliances, insulate, share space, and retrofit. Chapter 10 has a whole panoply of suggestions. Chapter 11 on transportation argues that mass transit and bicycles, though desirable, cannot meet the challenge of U.S. sprawl; it proposes computerized rideshares, a “smart jitney”—which already exists in several parts of the world (for instance, ZipCar, <[www.zipcar.com](http://www.zipcar.com)>). It would not have scheduled routes, but operate anywhere anytime and anyplace, and would allow persons to input preferences. For example, women could request rides with other women. Murphy addresses other concerns about security, safety, and privacy. What must change is the car culture of power, speed, force—and road rage.

Chapters 16 and 17 suggest steps toward hometown and neighborhood security: by localizing food, power generation, manufacturing, investment, and banking. Quality of life must replace quantity. What are the characteristics of this new low-energy lifestyle?

- Community...assumes friendliness.
- A feeling of belonging, being at home.
- Gardening, studies, the arts.
- Unity and cohesion: People assume they will be cared for if they are in need of help.
- Mutual concern and mutual assistance: as the fossil economy wanes, a large non-cash sector will emerge.
- Civic responsibility, joint ownership, shared tasks, and bees.
- Celebrations, traditions, and rituals.

Here are other classics of the localization movement, of which we might hope to see a review by QEW volunteers:

### **Would someone like to review any of these for a future BFC resource issue?**

E.F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful* (1973), Wendell Berry's *The Unsettling of America* (1977) and “The Idea of a Local Economy” (online, 2001), Bill Mollison *Permaculture Designer's Manual* (1988), Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel *Looking Forward* (1991), John Kortzman's *Building Cities from the Inside Out* (1997), Richard Douthwaite's *Short Circuit* (1998), Colin Hines's *Localization* (2000), Michael Shuman's *Going Local* (2000), Christopher and Dolores Nyerges's *Extreme Simplicity* (2002), Daniel Holmgren's *Permaculture* (2003), Richard Heinberg's *Powerdown* (2005), James Howard Kunstler's novel *World Made by Hand* (2008), Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon's *The Hundred Mile Diet* (2007), Chris Carlsson's *Nowtopia* (2008), Andrew Simms's *From the Ashes of the Crash* (2008), Lyle Estill's *Small Is Possible* (2008), and Lisa M. Hamilton's *Deeply Rooted* (forthcoming). ❖

### **New Steering Committee member is drawn to QEW's UN support role**

**DAVID MILLAR** says he has always been interested in the work of ecological witness of Quakers and couldn't resist the chance to attend the QEW Annual Meeting when it was held in 2007 in Burlington, Vermont, only a short drive from his home in Montreal, Canada.



**David Millar**

David had recently retired as a professor of history at Victoria University in British Columbia and had been looking for ways that he could work on environmental and social issues within the French-speaking community in Canada. He had already been involved in the work of the Quaker Institute for the Future, which includes several Canadian Quakers. He is a member of the Montreal (Quebec) Friends Meeting.

He and Mary Gilbert, another Steering Committee member, recently represented QEW at France Yearly Meeting and at a UN meeting in France.

Since joining the QEW Steering Committee, David has become active in the working group in support of the QEW representative to the UN and with the QEW Sustainability: Faith & Action working group. He is an outdoors enthusiast and especially enjoys bicycling. ❖

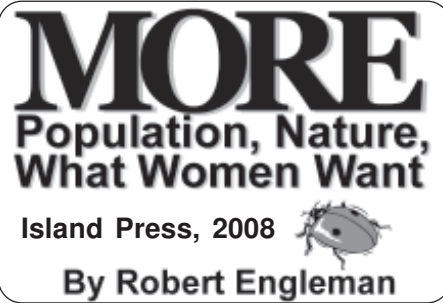
Reviewed by Roy C. Treadway  
Bloomington-Normal (Ill.)  
Friends Meeting

**R**OBERT ENGLEMAN joins many other writers recently calling for dramatic changes in how we view growth in a finite world. Books on peak oil, collapse, heat, climate change, carbon-free and nuclear-free, deep economy, and *Plan B 3.0* have all alerted us that the world cannot go on with business as usual without suffering dire consequences.

Among these books, *More: Population, Nature, and What Women Want* is the only one to focus on continued population growth in many countries and to present a clear and optimistic way to address high fertility in many nations where life is at peril with continued high mortality due to poverty, starvation, violence, and AIDS. Engleman's non-coercive approach is also relevant to countries with low fertility. He suggests an approach that is geared to what women want—which he believes will stabilize population at a level the earth can support.

The publication of *More* comes, however, at a time when concern for population has almost disappeared from public discourse. After World War II, public health programs, increased food production, and control of diseases had brought death rates down rapidly in many countries. Since fertility had remained high, worldwide population growth rates had soared. In response, family planning programs were started in many countries.

Engleman traces the decline of interest in population issues, starting in the mid 1970s and continuing today. Some family planning programs have been coercive, as in China's one-child policy and India's sterilization programs. Reaction to such excesses and the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion encouraged the Reagan, Bush-41, and Bush-43 administrations to withdraw U.S. support of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities. At the same time, western European countries and Japan became more concerned about their low fertility, recognizing that this could lead to a much larger proportion of non-working older people who would need support and health care. Women's groups were alarmed that men were often running the family planning programs, and development organizations felt economic development and free enterprise would solve all population problems around the world. Everywhere prevailed a pro-growth perspective, equating growth with prosperity.



Yet, as Engleman stresses, population growth continues on a trajectory to reach at least 9.0 billion persons by 2050, up from 6.7 billion today. The world is adding 80 million people each year, the same number as in 1993. The efforts that are being made to slow population growth seem to have little effect.

Engleman's solution to population growth is a simple one: *Contraception must be readily available to all women around the world, to choose to use as they, the women, want.* Abortion should be available, but if women can choose to have the number of children they want, abortion should be rare. Fertility in low-fertility countries might well increase. Compared to the costs of slowing climate change and providing resources for a growing population, supporting adequate family planning would be relatively inexpensive.

**H**E traces the evolution of humans over tens of thousands of years, noting that human child-bearing required extended social ties. Women's superior roles in hunting and gathering economies gave way to men's dominance in agriculture as work in the fields and the desire for armies to guard food and land favored men. *All the time, women, when they had a choice, did not have as many children as they biologically could.* They knew ways not to get pregnant if circumstances called for a smaller family. Using ethnographic observations, Engleman presents in detail his experience with groups of women around the world and in rural areas of the United States as they discuss their fertility and desire for ways to lower their fertility. He links recent changes in women's roles around the world to the growth of feminism and women's rights.

Engleman concludes:

*Population ... has always been a critical part of life. ... Sex, reproduction, and the number of us on the planet are forever tangled up together, and people have always had to struggle with the untangling. The clearest principle to guide us is that those who bear children should be the ones, more than anyone else, to decide when to do so. The rest will work itself out. We will not self-destruct through too much reproduction nor will we sadly fade away with too little.... Wanting not more people, but more for all people, we might find ourselves at home again, with more nature than we thought possible, in an Eden we can keep. ♦*

# Brown's Plan B, 3.0—Says it all, very well

Lester R. Brown, W.W. Norton, 2008

**THIS NEWEST PLAN** from the Earth Policy Institute is significant for two main reasons—the *depth of its research and the breadth of its perspective*. Many people are getting mobilized to save civilization, but most are able to focus on only a handful of issues.

**The table of contents of Plan B 3.0** (below) reminds us, however, that more than 70 specific social and ecological issues, within a dozen or more areas of critical importance, are integral to this global movement.

Rather than overwhelming and discouraging with alarming news, **Plan B 3.0, Mobilizing to Save Civilization** is written to help us understand and support all those around the planet who are engaged in this fateful rescue operation.

## A Civilization in Trouble

### 1. Deteriorating Oil and Food Security

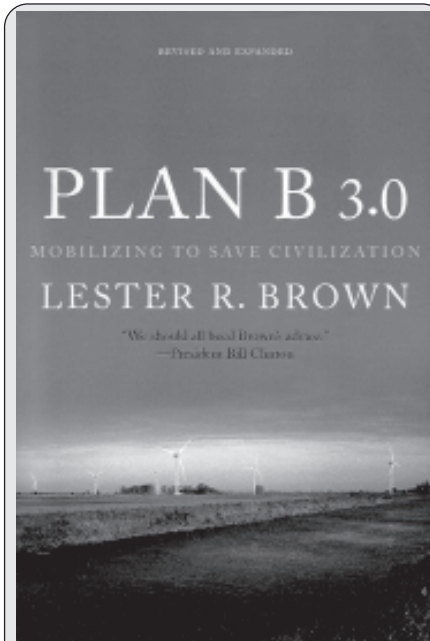
- The Coming Decline of Oil
- The Oil Intensity of Food
- The Changing Food Prospect
- Cars, People Compete for Crops
- The World Beyond Peak Oil
- Food Insecurity, Failing States

### 2. Rising Temperatures, Rising Seas

- Rising Temperature, Its Effects
- The Crop Yield Effect
- Reservoirs in the Sky
- Melting Ice and Rising Seas
- More Destructive Storms
- Cutting Carbon 80% by 2020

### 3. Emerging Water Shortages

- Water Tables Falling
- Rivers Running Dry
- Lakes Disappearing
- Farmers Losing to Cities
- Scarcity Crossing National Borders
- Water Scarcity Yields Political Stresses



### 4. Natural Systems Under Stress

- Shrinking Forests: Many Costs
- Losing Soil
- From Grassland to Desert
- Collapsing Fisheries
- Disappearing Plants, Animals

### 5. Early Signs of Decline

- Our Socially Divided World
- Health Challenge Growing
- Throwaway Economy in Trouble
- Population, Resource Conflicts
- Environmental Refugees on the Rise
- Mounting Stresses, Failing States

## The Response—Plan B

### 6. Eradicating Poverty, Stabilizing Population

- Universal Basic Education
- Stabilizing Population
- Better Health for All
- Curbing the HIV Epidemic
- Reducing Farm Subsidies, Debt
- A Poverty Eradication Budget

### 7. Restoring the Earth

- Protecting and Restoring Forests
- Conserving, Rebuilding Soils

- Regenerating Fisheries
- Protecting Plant and Animal Diversity
- Planting Trees to Sequester Carbon
- The Earth Restoration Budget

### 8. Feeding Eight Billion Well

- Rethinking Land Productivity
- Raising Water Productivity
- Producing Protein More Efficiently
- Moving Down the Food Chain
- Action on Many Fronts

### 9. Designing Cities for People

- The Ecology of Cities
- Redesigning Urban Transport
- Reducing Urban Water Use
- Farming in the City
- Upgrading Squatter Settlements
- Cities for People

### 10. Raising Energy Efficiency

- Banning the (incandescent) bulb
- Energy-Efficient Appliances
- More-Efficient Building
- Restructuring the Transport System
- A New Materials Economy
- The Energy Savings Potential

### 11. Turning to Renewable Energy

- Harnessing the Wind
- Wind-Powered Plug-in Hybrid Cars
- Solar Cells and Collectors
- Energy from the Earth
- Plant-based Sources of Energy
- River, Tidal, and Wave Power
- The World Energy Economy of 2020

## An Exciting New Option

### 12. The Great Mobilization

- Shifting Taxes and Subsidies
- Summing Up Climate Stabilization Measures
- A Response to Failing States
- A Wartime Mobilization
- Mobilizing to Save Civilization
- What You and I Can Do**

## ***The Transition Handbook:***

***From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience***

**Rob Hopkins**

**Green Books Ltd., 2008**

**Reviewed by Roy H. Taylor III**

**Atlanta, Ga., Friends Meeting**

**T**HIS “how to start a movement” book has been so popular among “peak oil\*” activists that it has sold out in many locations. Rob Hopkins realized very quickly that he was on to something as the creation of the first “Transition Towns” took place in Kinsale, Ireland, and Totnes, England a few years ago. Steeped in the principles of permaculture that he taught for many years, Hopkins appears to have been the right person at the right time for this job. Serendipity of events completed the picture.

*The future of less oil could be preferable to the present if we can engage in enough imagination, creativity, adaptability in that process.—R. H.*

In a time of recognition of the potential perils of reaching peak oil, what can we do to plan for a society that is less dependent on oil? How can we power down our energy requirements? What are the pieces that need to be in place to effect change in the communities where we live?

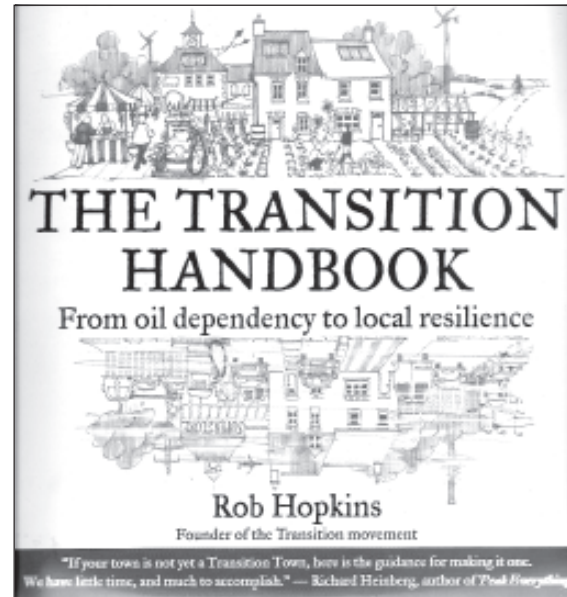
While it seems at first thought that this might be a version of a “Sustainable” Sim City or how to create a utopia out in the woods somewhere else, that would be an easy task compared to what this book is presenting. The one thing that it shares with those types of plans is that this will create very intentional community.

*It is one thing to campaign against climate change and quite another to paint a compelling and engaging vision of a post-carbon world in such a way as to enthruse others to embark on a journey towards it.—R.H.*

The power of this book is not just in the information it provides but in the way it is presented. The

### **\*—What the bleep is “Peak Oil” ?**

**IT IS THE POINT** when petroleum suppliers are no longer able to keep up with demand, due to irreversible decline in oil field production, leading to sharp rises in oil prices. This gap will have severe impacts on the global economy, due to the high dependence of most modern industrial transport, agricultural and industrial systems on the relatively low cost and high availability of oil. For more information, see <[www.hubbertypeak.com/](http://www.hubbertypeak.com/)>



book is divided into three sections, Head, Heart, and Hands. The author first makes the rational argument of the need for change, then engages the power of vision and possibility before outlining the work that needs to be done to accomplish it. This process is so masterfully presented that readers are caught up in the excitement of the Transition Initiative so as to want to go work on it themselves, or inspired to just get to work harder on those great projects that they are already working on.

The arguments about peak oil and climate change made in the first section of the book may be familiar to most *BeFriending Creation* readers but they are well laid out and create the setting.

The second section is Hopkins’s appeal to the Heart with positive vision. This is the key to creating the community involvement necessary to accomplish the work of making the transition from oil dependency to local resilience. As the vision of what might be is created, a desire is born to make it happen.

The third section is the real “how to” portion of the book as it explains “The Transition Approach” to the community development movement that has been started. This is valuable reading for anyone working on community or group development on almost any large project. The six principles that Hopkins lays out—based in part on those of Permaculture—include: visioning, inclusion, awareness-raising, resilience, psychological insights, and credible and appropriate solutions.

**Warning:** When you finish reading this book, be prepared to want to get involved with the Transition Initiative where you live.

Go to <[www.transitionculture.org](http://www.transitionculture.org); <http://transitionus.ning.com>> to find the site in your state. ❖



## Denver Quaker helps her community become a Transition Town

**DURING** an open presentation session during the 2008 QEW Annual Gathering, Dawn Howard, a QEW supporter from Mountain View Friends Meeting in Denver, described her involvement in the Transition Towns movement, which was founded three years ago in England to help communities prepare for the coming changes due to peak oil and human-induced climate change. Currently more than 700 towns are involved in the program.

Although the Transition Initiative was designed for small- to medium-sized towns, it was soon picked up by residents of Boulder, Colo., and Dawn was an enthusiastic early participant when it spread to neighboring Denver.

The basic idea is that ordinary people working together in community can take the lead making themselves less dependent on nonrenewable resources while developing social bonds that can help them withstand the stressful conditions that lie ahead. It is a process of learning appropriate life skills, such as gardening, and becoming part of an evolving, flexible network of supportive relationships. It teaches ordinary people how to confront common problems face to face in a spirit of cooperation and optimism, she told the group.

While one of its 12 principles is to reach out to local governments, the Transition Towns approach emphasizes grassroots activities that do not require official approval and do not depend on expert training. It can inspire and empower people who have been saddened and immobilized by grim forecasts of what the future may hold. ❖

## Heinberg: Our generation still has a chance to leave a positive legacy

### IN HIS PREVIOUS WORKS

(*The Party's Over*, 2003, and *Powerdown*, 2004, Richard Heinberg demonstrated exceptional insight into the personal, psychological, and cultural dimensions of sustainable energy issues. In his new *Peak Everything, Waking up to the Century of Declines*

(New Society Publishers, 2008) he probes deeper into basic questions of how we became mired in so many simultaneous social and ecological crises and what seems to block us from choosing lasting solutions.

After surveying current trends in resource depletion and soaring growth in demand, Heinberg concludes that our best hope at this point is to complete the 21<sup>st</sup> century without complete social breakdown and ecological collapse. This will require rapid transition to renewable sources of energy and stabilization of the human population.

At the same time, as individuals and communities we need to develop the attitudes, skills, and tools required for less energy-intensive and less technology-driven lifestyles, while preserving whatever aspects of our culture we have come to value as “beautiful, sane, and intelligent.”

This represents more of a “lifeboat” mindset than, say, Lester Brown’s *Plan B 3.0*. But Heinberg holds out hope that in the pursuit of survival some basic lessons of will become permanently etched into our cultural memory—specifically “*that growth is not always good, that modest material goods*

*are usually better for everyone in the long run than extravagant ones, and that any technology has a hidden cost.*” He reminds us that the longer we wait the fewer options we will have.

But a key question for Heinberg is what it will take to unite our culturally diverse world population

on a program to reduce our collective ecological footprint. “*Why do some people seem immediately to understand the importance of overarching systemic problems like oil depletion and climate change, while others react with indifference or denial?*”

Incomprehension and resistance to

change can be explained partly as a lack of psychological maturity, which keeps people from being concerned about long-term consequences, taking responsibility for their actions, and accepting loss.

Heinberg proposes a thoughtfully designed social marketing program that might help society as a whole respond with greater maturity to the stresses and uncertainties of the moment, resulting in individual and group choices that are more likely to improve future outcomes for everyone.

Heinberg notes that our language is laden with magical thought patterns, which makes us susceptible to the irrational appeals of advertising and political propaganda. To avoid this pitfall, we need to be more grounded in the disciplines of logic and evidence and committed to an ethic of truth-seeking that transcends myths of religion and progress. ❖



## ***The Suicidal Planet: How to Prevent Global Climate Catastrophe***

Mayer Hillman, Thomas Dunn Books, 2007

**DESPITE** an unfortunate title, this is an good introduction to survival strategies for those who understand that our planet has developed a serious “fever” and want to know what we are going to do to cure it.

Unfortunately, most of us are still operating at the level of folk-remedies when we should be applying the best knowledge that the physical and social sciences have to offer. Our governments, educational institutions, and news media are soft-pedaling the truth and are distracting the public with trivial issues to avoid an unpredictable general panic, Hillman says.

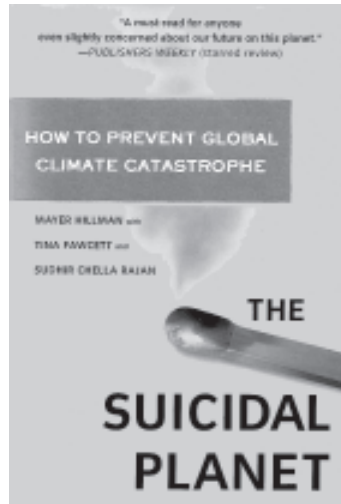
After reviewing the major technologies and strategies currently being debated, Hillman concludes, “Even the combined and most optimistic projections of technological development will not begin to deliver the reduction required. Only in the context of strict limits on carbon dioxide emissions can the technological options ... play a meaningful role in averting climate catastrophe.”

Hillman also concludes that most government programs and international treaties to date have been ineffective in preparing the world community to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to the required levels.

The most promising solution, he believes, is a new system called “*Contraction & Convergence*” (C&C), which was first proposed by the Global Commons Institute. After a limit to total greenhouse gas emissions and a timetable for reaching that goal are adopted, all citizens of participating countries would receive per-capita carbon allowances, which could be traded among individuals and groups for mutual benefit.

Much of the book is devoted to exploring how C&C could win public and political support and how carbon allowances would be measured and administered. There would be, of course, winners and losers in any alternative system, and the C&C approach raises questions about how it would affect daily life and how a transition from the status quo would be managed. But ultimately it is a *moral* decision.

However, Hillman maintains, “We have been unable to find an alternative [to C&C] that stands up to [the] scrutiny that we have attempted to apply to carbon allowances.” ❖



## **Al Gore Jr. endorses the “350” campaign in Poland**

**IT WAS A GOOD OMEN** that on December 16, the 350th day of the year, former Vice President Al Gore Jr. endorsed the growing “350” Campaign during his highly acclaimed speech to the UN climate talks in Poznan, Poland.

The talks were part of the ongoing negotiations to reach international agreement on rapid global reductions in climate-changing greenhouse gases, to replace the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which had been endorsed by the overwhelming majority of countries (the U.S. and Australia being notable holdouts).

The current negotiations, which began in 2007, were based on the scientific community’s latest consensus that *400 to 450 parts per million* (ppm) was the safe upper limit for greenhouse gases. But last year NASA’s James Hansen, a leading spokesman for the world’s climatologists, lowered his recommendations for a safe upper limit to *350 ppm*. Bill McKibben and other climate activists quickly launched the “350” campaign to raise global awareness of the need to reduce emissions below that fateful “tipping point.” (The current concentration of greenhouse gases is *385 ppm* and rising.) The main purpose of the 350 initiative is to publicize the number “350” in as many ways as possible. For example, 350 activists lined up to form the numeral “350” so they could be photographed from the air.

**IN HIS RECENT SPEECH** during the UN talks in Poland, Gore said,

*In this struggle between our hopes for success and the doubts that constantly complicate this task, we have to call upon the people of the world to speak up more forcefully, to put their weight in balance of the scales that are measured by world leaders. The truth is that the goals we are reaching for are incredibly difficult, and even a goal of 450 ppm, which seems so difficult today, is inadequate. We will soon need to toughen that goal to 350 ppm [cheers and applause], because ultimately this really is not a political issue. It is, of course, a moral issue and even a spiritual issue, however you understand that word—and our different traditions lead us to different ways of describing the spiritual challenge—but this one affects the survival of human civilization.*

For more information about how you can contribute to the “350” campaign, go to <[www.350.org](http://www.350.org)>. ❖

## 'Walk With Earth' to hold second grassroots environmental conference in Mexico

**GREETINGS** to the QEW community from San Cristobal de las Casas. It has taken 8 months to walk across 11 Mexican states, but I am within miles of the Guatemalan border. Who would have thought it possible? I have talked to almost 200 classrooms, and had 240 people walk with me for a day or longer. We have given out hundreds of pictures of the world from space on postcards and dozens of solar ovens, and held a conference in Mexico City for grass roots environmentalists from the northwest of Mexico. It was so successful that **Walk With Earth** has decided to do another conference in southern Mexico in February.

Oaxaca is the most advanced area in ecological terms I have seen in Mexico or the United States. There is an indigenous community that has planted 475,000 trees, and aims for a million. There are 20,000 "dry" toilets that separate urine from excrement, use them for fertilizer and compost, and eliminate the need for new sewers. They have a great public transportation system that uses big buses, small buses, vans, and collective taxis. There are solar panels and windmills. A trash company in Morelos handles 1,000 tons of trash a day and recycles 79 percent, selling the inorganic stuff to different vendors, the PEET plastic they make into thread that can be used to manufacture things, and uses bacteria from Colombia to make compost of the organic stuff (including disposable baby diapers) in one month's time. *Most important, there are 18 indigenous cultures that still treat the earth as sacred space.*

**Walk With Earth** has decided to do another conference for grass roots environmentalists in

southern Mexico, in collaboration with la Universidad de la Tierra in Oaxaca <[unitierra.blogspot.com](http://unitierra.blogspot.com)>. It will be February 19th to 23rd in Oaxaca. Thursday we will have a couple of speakers, Friday will be site visits to permaculture, water treatment, waste management, and reforestation sites. There will also be presentations by the environmentalists on Mayan medicine, women's cooperatives, reforestation projects, preservation of corn seed varieties. Saturday and Sunday there will be workshops and booths by the different organizations, including demonstrations on building dry toilets, alternative energy supplies (solar, bio-digesters), rain catchment systems, etc. It will be in a local park, and open to the public.

We are inviting groups from 50 organizations outside Oaxaca and all the groups in Oaxaca City. Most of these groups can't pay for this kind of conference, so **Walk With Earth** has agreed to pay \$5,000 for ground transportation and food for people coming from out of town. La Universidad de la Tierra is providing lodging in a local church and with families. *We have decided it is so valuable to do this conference that even if it means we have to cut the walk short by a couple of months, it is worth it.* It is so exciting to be part of this conference, to let them see how much is going on in southern Mexico, and that they have much to teach the rest of the world.

If you are interested in more information, e-mail Rolene at <[rolene@walkwithearth.org](mailto:rolene@walkwithearth.org)>. If you can help with the expenses of the conference, you can make a contribution via PayPal on the website.

—Rolene Walker  
enroute from San Diego to Santiago

## BeFriending Creation

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We publish **BeFriending Creation** to promote the work of Quaker Earthcare Witness, stimulate discussion and action, share insights, practical ideas, and news of our actions, and encourage among Friends a sense of community and spiritual connection with all Creation. Opinions expressed are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of Quaker Earthcare Witness, or of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). The editor is responsible for unsigned items. Submission deadlines are February 7, April 7, June 7, August 7, October 7, and December 7.

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### VISION AND WITNESS

WE ARE CALLED to live in right relationship with all Creation, recognizing that the entire world is interconnected and is a manifestation of God. WE WORK to integrate into the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends the Truth that God's Creation is to be respected, protected, and held in reverence in its own right, and the Truth that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring the earth's ecological integrity. WE PROMOTE these truths by being patterns and examples, by communicating our message, and by providing spiritual and material support to those engaged in the compelling task of transforming our relationship to the earth.

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## The climate book we sent to Barack Obama

### DEAR PRESIDENT-ELECT OBAMA,

Congratulations on your historic election. We Vermonters were rooting for you, and many of us worked for and donated to your campaign because you had lifted our hopes for positive change.

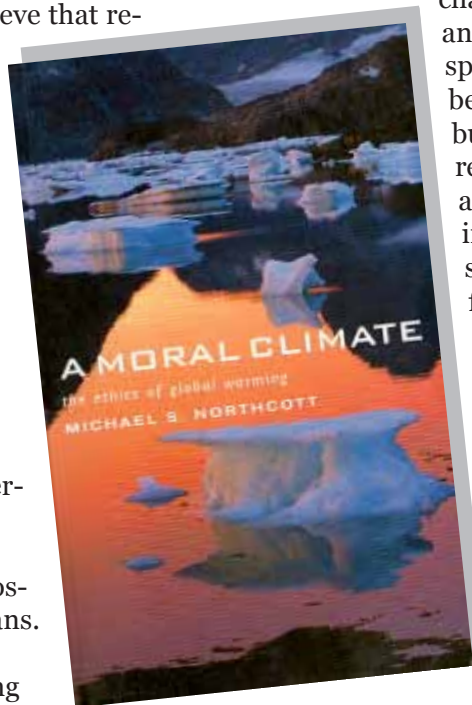
We know that many special interests are now competing for your attention. But we believe that re-stabilizing the global climate is urgent and fundamental to addressing all of the issues of the day.

The mood of the country has been affected greatly by the recent crisis in the housing and financial markets, and we realize that the human economy needs to be put back into order before most people will be willing and able to give sufficient attention to other pressing social and ecological issues. At the same time, it is important for our leaders and the general public to develop a very different understanding of economics, in order to see how stabilization of the climate cannot be separated from prosperity and economic justice for humans.

We are a small study group who have been reading together an exciting book, *A Moral Climate—The Ethics of Global Warming* (Orbis Books, 2007) by Michael Northcott. He is Professor of Ethics at the University of Edinburgh and a priest in the Scottish Episcopal Church. We started meeting together four years ago to explore the curricula of the Northwest Earth Institute ([www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org)). It is amazing how our regular discussions have supported us in making many personal changes to reduce our carbon and ecological footprints. We also are increasingly aware that

individual changes will not be enough to stem the tide of global warming unless there is also transformation in values, policies, and priorities at the state, national, and international levels.

Northcott's book is helping us develop such a different understanding of economics and climate change, through his in-depth research and his fresh, wise, and informed perspective. Many excellent books have been written about climate change, but we think this one is particularly relevant at a time when economics and environment are so obviously interconnected and our leaders need sound research and moral insights for charting a new direction in policies and priorities.



**WE KNOW** you are already very informed, but we think you would appreciate how Northcott explains climate change issues in terms of the historical development of ethical and financial concepts behind most conventional thinking today. This has helped us to see more clearly what kind of change is needed and what forces

in our society will be trying to stop that change.

Please accept this as a gift as an expression of our confidence in your judgment and integrity. Know that we are holding you in our thoughts over the coming first months of your presidency and that we are doing our part to assure your success.

—For the Earth  
Ruah Swennerfelt, Louis Cox  
and the Northwest Earth Institute  
Study Group of Charlotte, Vermont