

THE COMOX VALLEY CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLES(1)

About the Chronicles

When we get up in the morning and look outside we think we are seeing the same world we saw the night before. But we aren't. We are seeing a different world. Scientists are telling us that we are destroying species, poisoning the oceans, polluting the air we breathe, destroying topsoil, "chemicalizing" the land, blowing a larger hole in the ozone layer that protects us, destroying the Arctic and Antarctic ice fields that help stabilize our climate. So why don't we do something about it?

For three reasons. First, we don't know how to respond. We have never dealt with a problem of this magnitude before. Second, climate change is not perceived as a "clear and present danger"--an immediate threat. It is not like a war, or a nuclear explosion, or a massive global economic meltdown. Third, there is the psychological and emotional blockage. We often fail to notice the barriers in our personal psyches. George Marshall described our situation in his book *Don't even think about it. Why our brains are wired to reject climate change.*

I like the way Marshal McLuhan, the Canadian communications guru, put it. He said, "*I don't know who it was that first discovered water but I'm sure it wasn't a fish.*" The fish doesn't notice water until it is flopping around on the dock and saying to itself, "Hey, isn't there supposed to be water around here or something?" And so it is with us. We tend not to notice our environment, or gradual changes in our environment. But, as we shall see, we may not have a choice.

Scientists are telling us that we have entered into a new historical era that is replacing the Holocene era. It provided a relatively stable period that has existed since the receding ice fields 11,000 years ago. The new era began in the middle of the last century and has been called The Anthropocene Era. As the title suggests ("anthro" means "human" and "cene" means "new") it is the new and first ever man-made era.

So the Anthropocene is not simply the development of another new "natural" era. This one is very different. And what makes it especially different is that it is introducing a series of *irreversible transitions* in the world we have come to know.

Unlike previous natural eras where nature tended to "bounce back" over time, many things in the Anthropocene will not "bounce back." The huge number of extinct species in our lifetimes are gone forever; the disintegrating ice fields in the Arctic and Antarctic are not reviving; the hole in the ozone layer protecting us from the sun is not closing. So, to use the vernacular, we find ourselves "up shit creek". The poet Robert Bass described the real irony of this new age we are creating. "*We are the only protectors;*

and we are the ones in need of protection; and we are the thing it needs to be protected from.”

So the situation is dire but it is not hopeless. All over the world communities like ours are taking steps to deal with climate change. We can learn from them. The Comox Valley can become a model for other communities in B.C., Canada and elsewhere. There is a huge amount of this scientific information available on the web. But there is a severe shortage of how to translate it into information for action at the local level.

The decision of the previous Harper government to walk away from the Kyoto Protocol and the current efforts of President Trump to walk away from the Paris Conference of Parties (COP 21) gives us a clear message. Action will not come from the top down. It must come from the bottom up.

Our future chronicles will deal with a wide range of subjects: developing a new community climate change consciousness; creating a community vision and culture; fostering an earth jurisprudence: introducing restorative justice; relationship beyond stewardship; developing alternatives and transitions; responsibility for earth and community; resilience and an earth spirituality; dealing with “wicked problems” by way of systems thinking.

We do not have *the answer* for dealing with climate change at the local level. No one does. We are in a trial and error process. We are hoping that these chronicles will evoke helpful responses and approaches we can share with one another.