

## CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLE 41

### Thinking in Contexts—Two Stories

If we hope to think realistically about dealing with climate change in a changing world, we have to learn to think in contexts. The word “context” comes from two Latin words: “con” meaning “together” and “textere” meaning “to weave”. So “context” means “to weave together”.

Dealing with climate change is not like dealing with a specific service or discipline—like environment, or medicine, or physics. It is a weaving together of a variety of different elements into a context.

I believe that the best way to describe contextual thinking is through story. So this chronicle is about two stories.

#### **Thinking like a Mountain.**

Aldo Leopold’s story “Thinking Like a Mountain” is probably the most famous story in all of environmental literature. It is about a conversion in his personal thinking and acting.

He tells about being on a hunting trip with several friends. In those days he noted that they would shoot any wolf they could see.

One day he and his friends were having lunch halfway up a mountain. They looked down at a rock pile and saw a mother wolf with young cubs playing in the sunshine on the edge of a rock pile. They started shooting, hit the mother and then saw a pup dragging a leg into an impassible rock slide. They went down to investigate.

*“We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and the mountain. I was young then but full of “trigger itch”; I thought that fewer wolves would mean more deer and that no wolves would mean a hunter’s paradise. But after seeing the green fire die I sensed that neither the world nor the mountain agreed with such a view.”*

Leopold goes on to explain that with no wolves the deer would increase and eat every plant or seedling and that all life on the mountain would eventually disappear. So we have to “Think like a Mountain.”

And now for a very different story.

#### **Thinking Like a Community**

Father Jean Pochat was a highly respected Oblate priest who had lived and worked with the Tlicho people in the Northwest Territories for thirty-five years. They were difficult years—the years the Tlicho describe as “The Time of Darkness”. These were the years where the children were taken from their families and sent to residential schools where they were stripped of their culture. This had terrible social impacts on all aspects of community life for generations.

A few years before his death I had a conversation with Father Pochat about diamond mining. After settling their land claim, the Tlicho approved the development of two diamond mines in their territory. Being a confirmed environmentalist in those days, I was surprised by this and asked Fr. Pochat what he thought of the mines.

He said, "I have mixed feelings about the mines. But I will tell you two things. Everyone who complains about them has a job. And none of them have ever lived in a community with five hundred jobless men." He also noted the damage communities had suffered in terms of their traditional culture.

(There is a definition that some Dene communities have adopted. Unlike people in our culture that seem to identify communities by their geographic location, the Dene had a different understanding of community. They were nomadic people. They went where the food was. A traditional definition of *community* among some Dene people is "*An intimate relationship with all living things... both animate and inanimate.*" The mention of both *animate* and *inanimate* may have been for the benefit of non-indigenous folks who don't instinctively think of all things as having life.)

So both stories are an example of contextual thinking. Aldo Leopold weaves together the wolves, the deer, the plants and the mountain. Father Pochat weaves the relationship of the mines to jobs in the community and to social problems coming out of the Time of Darkness.

### **Contextual Thinking and Climate Change.**

Climate change is not a simple environmental phenomenon. It is a context—a new context because we are living in a new Anthropocentric world.

Climate change affects everything. (If you doubt this, try to think of something it does not affect.) Unfortunately we have been trying to use the silo-type thinking that seemed to work in the old world to solve the new problems of a new world.

So in reality all environmental issues are economic issues, and all economic issues are environmental issues. They are intimately linked together except when we try to solve them with silo thinking. We need to use contextual thinking.

In my next chronicle I will adopt some contextual thinking to deal with a current economic /environmental issue—the Kinder-Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline.